MANNY PACQUIAO: ALL-TIME GREAT?

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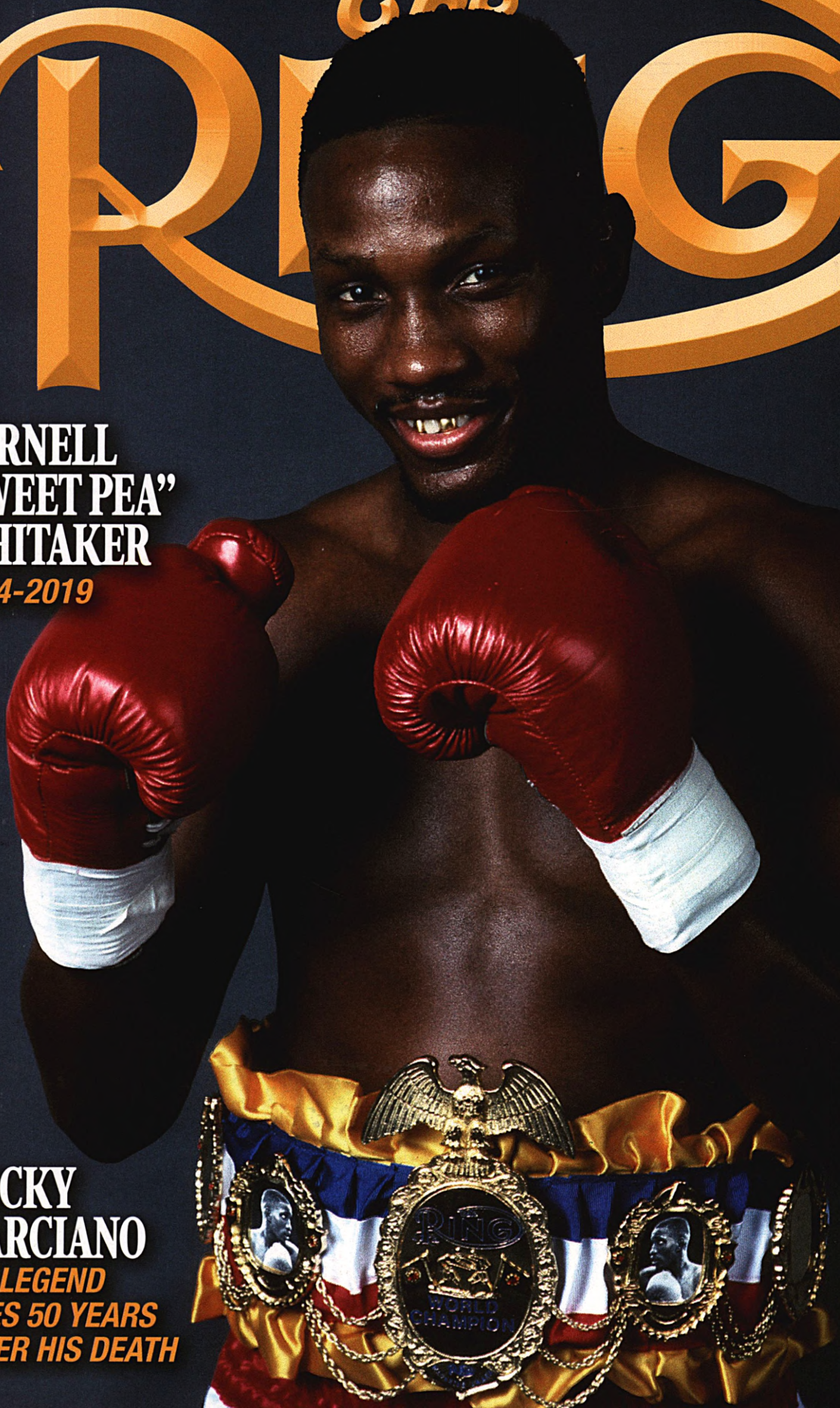

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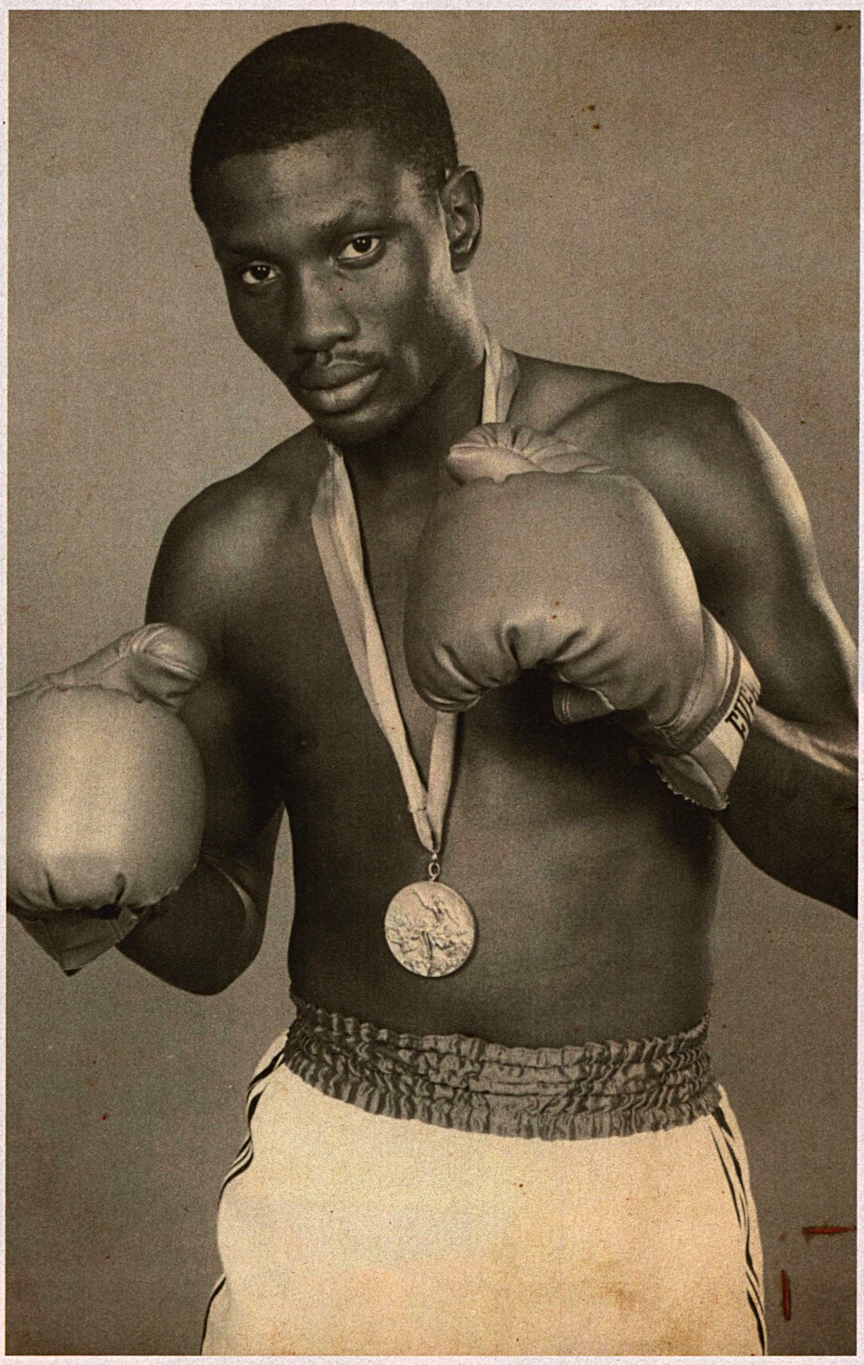

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By Doug Fischer

Pernell Whitaker cherished his 1984 Olympic gold medal more than the fortune and world titles he earned as pro.

Ryota Murata proved again on July 12 against Rob Brant that he knows how to do rematches. In 2017, the Japanese Olympic gold medalist avenged his only other professional loss with a seventh-round stoppage of Hassan N'Dam. Against Brant, he did even better, overwhelming the American with face-warping punches early and erasing the sting of a unanimous-decision loss last October with a TKO in the second round.

PHOTO BY NAOKI FUKUDA

The best boxers in the sport, such as lightweight champ and pound-for-pound king Vasiliy Lomachenko, hold Ring Magazine titles.

THE MOST VALUABLE BELTS ARE FREE

I am writing in response to the letter from Allen Morris that appeared in your July 2019 issue under the headline "A Little Constructive Criticism."

I am a long-term reader of The Ring and totally support your championship policy. I and all my buddies who are boxing fans turn to your ratings to identify who is a genuine champion and who is just a claimant. It's true that the alphabet groups are ingrained on the sport, but it's also true that many fans view them as self-serving money-grabbers who have turned boxing into a confusing mess. Just about anyone can win an alphabet belt these days, and a fighter often doesn't even have to beat anyone of any significance to win one.

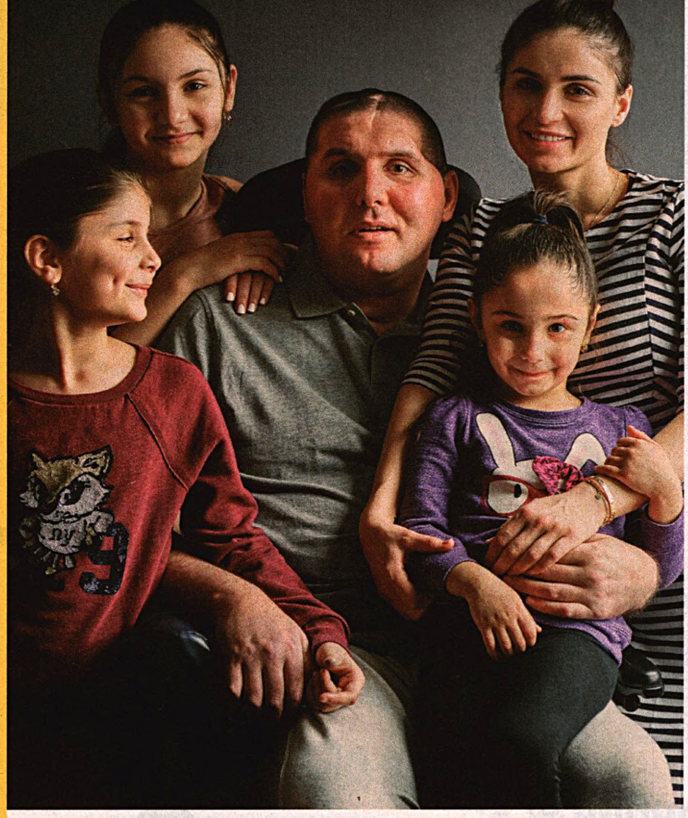
I find it hard to believe that a boxer considers himself to be a true "world champion" when he has just won the IBF belt by beating some nobody from Italy who has a record of 12-0 against tomato cans and while there's also at least three or four other guys all claiming to be "world champion" in the same division! Are these boxers really that deluded? It's ridiculous.

I implore The Ring to do everything you can to promote your championships and your champions. The Ring belt is "The Hardest Belt To Get," and if you promote it as such then it will be viewed as such. Hopefully, it can generate a chain reaction among fans and the media and the perception of the Ring belt as the most meaningful one to win will grow. In turn, boxers will pick up on this more and more and be more keen to aim for the Ring championship.

The Ring is ingrained in the sport just as much as the alphabet groups and you have a great platform with which to build on. Other outfits, such as the Transnational Boxing Rankings Board, that recognize one legitimate world champion per division pretty much toil in anonymity. But The Ring has a global audience at its fingertips. Keep going and good luck.

Ayshea O'Garro
ayshea_admirer@yahoo.co.uk

Editor's response: Thank you for the words of encouragement, Ayshea. We will continue to fight the good fight. It's a battle in which we've gained ground in recent years, as we've seen more boxers celebrate earning a Ring ranking via social media while more fans and networks recognize our title belts as the true world championships of the sport. And why wouldn't they? The best boxers on the planet – including the pound-for-pound elite of Vasiliy Lomachenko, Canelo Alvarez, Naoya Inoue and Aleksandr Usyk – are Ring champions. There are more reigning Ring champs than ever – eight – including recently crowned undisputed women's champions Claressa Shields and Katie Taylor, and we'll likely crown at least two more before the end of 2019. We don't charge our champions sanctioning fees. We're not out to make a buck from our titles. And we don't mess around with "super" and "regular" titles or diamond, silver and gold belts. We don't do regional, intercontinental or international titles. There will never be an interim Ring champion, or a Ring champ "in recess" or "emeritus." Those who hold Ring titles are WORLD champions, and they had to earn that status by defeating the best of their divisions.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

After reading "The Face of Boxing" (August 2019), the photos and text left me thinking … What can we do as boxing fans to help this lovely family? Is there a fund we can contribute to? Thank you, Ring Magazine, for publishing it … and thanks to Wojtek Urbanek and Thomas Hauser for a job well done.

Scott Kerr
Nikolski, Alaska

Mr. Hauser responds: Magomed Abdusalamov's family is well provided for by the financial settlement that his lawyers achieved. The most important thing boxing fans can do now is put pressure on the New York State Athletic Commission to upgrade its performance to ensure that an avoidable tragedy like this never happens again. Visit The Ring's online site to read an investigative report I authored on the NYSAC earlier this year: https://bit.ly/2xPsVhD

WHERE'S ANDY?

I love Ring Magazine, but come on, guys. Three feature articles on the fall of Anthony Joshua and not one featuring Andy Ruiz? I would love to hear this guy's story. We are witnessing a true Big 4 in the heavyweight division (Big 5 if Luis Ortiz wins his rematch with Wilder), and I'm sure I'm not the only one who wants to hear the Andy Ruiz story. If you think his KO of Joshua was a fluke, go back right now and watch that fight again.

Nick Holtzman
Milwaukee, Wis.

Editor's response: There's no need for us to re-watch Joshua-Ruiz; The Ring's editorial board knows that Andy is a heavyweight to be reckoned with and we recognize him as the unified titleholder that he is. We look forward to sitting down with Ruiz and his team for the cover story of an upcoming issue (most likely after the fight date for the Joshua rematch is announced and he begins his training camp). Until then, here's a couple things you can keep in mind: First, Ruiz scored his monumental upset toward the end of a production cycle of the magazine. We had just enough time to assign immediate reaction stories on the fight, but grabbing either heavyweight for an extended, exclusive interview wasn't going to happen. Joshua obviously headed back home to lick his wounds, while Ruiz embarked on an immediate victory tour that had yet to end at the time of this writing. Second, we had planned to feature Ruiz on the cover of this issue prior to the untimely passing of Pernell Whitaker.

BOO, 'BOO BOO'

Styles make fights, and entertaining styles make for entertaining and watchable fighters. Demetrius Andrade's recent dominating performance over Maciej Sulecki revealed only that Andrade is a fighter to be avoided. Why would GGG or Canelo sign up for a fight against an opponent who will make them run in pursuit, miss plenty and most likely go the distance? How does a victory over Andrade enhance a P4P claim? A 120-107 win speaks volumes about Andrade's (in)ability to close the show. Are viewers (other than the good folks of Providence) REALLY supposed to pay to see this track meet? Here's a concept: two FIGHTERS throwing and landing punches. Mr. Andrade needs to understand that marketability is paramount, and marketability comes with action.

Richard Fineo
Los Angeles

TWEET OF THE MONTH

WRITE TO THE RING! Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209 comeoutwriting@gmail.com ★ Emailed letters will include a writer's email address unless a city and state of origin are provided. Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.

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UNTOUCHABLE GREATNESS

What follows is the eulogy written and delivered by Main Events CEO Kathy Duva at Pernell Whitaker's funeral on July 20 at Scope Arena in Norfolk, Virginia:

Whitaker was a proud Sweet Scientist who never doubted that he was pound-for-pound No. 1.

To put it quite simply, he was "The best that ever did it."

Today we are here to mourn our tragic loss. But we are also here to celebrate a life that was, to say the least, extraordinary.

My relationship with Pernell Whitaker was through boxing. My company, Main Events, had the privilege to promote Pete's fights throughout his storied career. To many of you, he was a father, a son, a husband, a brother, a relative and a friend. But while he was also a friend to many of us in the boxing business, he was first and foremost the "Best Pound-for-Pound Fighter in the World." And one of the greatest practitioners of the Sweet Science that ever lived. So I am going to talk about that today.

Pete won just about every title and accolade a fighter could hope to achieve: captain of the greatest Olympic boxing team in history, Olympic gold medalist, undisputed and lineal lightweight champion, junior welterweight champion, lineal welterweight champion, junior middleweight champion.

Named the Fighter of the Year in 1989 by both the Boxing Writers Association of America and The Ring Magazine, he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2007 on the first ballot.

But I know that the title that meant the most to him – the one that no corrupt or incompetent judge could take away – was "Pound for Pound." That's how he signed his autograph. And that is how the boxing community remembers him. "Pound for Pound." In the ring, during the years that he was in his prime, nobody could touch Pernell Whitaker.

During the past few days I have experienced a confusing mixture

of pride and sadness. Pride that the boxing community has been so generous in its affirmations of his greatness since his passing. I have been pleased to learn that so many fans and boxing pundits now share my view that he really did beat Oscar De La Hoya. And that he may have been the greatest lightweight of all time.

And sadness because he was not here to receive that praise in person. But I know that if he was standing here beside me, as he most surely is, he would ask all of his former critics, "What took you so long?!!!"

Pete's former trainer, Ronnie Shields, told a reporter the other day that Pernell was an artist. Like many great artists, Sweet Pea was not appreciated nearly enough in his time. Some writers actually called him boring. As if Pernell Whitaker could EVER be boring! Some said he didn't punch hard enough. As if punching power mattered as he glided across the ring in his southpaw stance, defying his baffled opponents to hit him, turning them around and then tapping them on the shoulder.

If you asked his rivals right after their match about his punch, and I frequently did, they always confirmed that he hit them a lot harder than they expected. He simply chose not to engage in outright brutality when it was so much more fun to tease and taunt his opponents into submission. Or as he once explained to a reporter, he preferred to take "their confidence, their fight plan. They can't hit you, the fight is yours."

That desire – to remember to have fun – was something he often expressed as he exited the locker room and headed toward the ring. That cost him, of course. But still he held his head up when he was denied clear victories on three separate occasions that are remembered as being among the greatest boxing robberies ever.

I have rewatched many of those moments during the past few days, and it brought back a flood of memories. Not just of Pernell, but of others who were such a big part of his career that we have lost: Lou Duva, George Benton, Ace Marotta, Art Cavalier, Joe Souza, Dennis Dueltgen, Bob Wareing from Virginia Beach, Artie Curry of HBO and, of course, my beloved late husband, Dan Duva. I realize that many of you don't know all of their names. But they all loved him and they meant the world to Pete. It must have been a lifetime ago. But on days like this, it seems like it was yesterday. We really had everything.

On Monday, a reporter remarked that he was surprised to hear me laugh so much on such a sad day. But, you see, I cannot talk about Pete without laughing. He was one of the funniest people I have ever known, even though I am not certain that it was always intentional. But as we in the boxing community began to share our stories this past week, we found ourselves laughing a lot through our tears:

There was the time I found Pernell on his hands and knees in my family room, teaching my then-10- and 11-year-old daughters how to shoot craps.

Or that little shimmy that he performed as he turned on his heel and walked back to his corner, away from Oscar De La Hoya.

Pete started fighting former world champions in his 11th pro fight. One of them was Roger Mayweather, uncle and future trainer of Floyd and an experienced, accomplished boxer with 30 fights under his belt. Pernell was clearly not intimidated. In just his 12th professional boxing match, Pete pulled down Roger's pants to his knees during their bout on national television – right here in this very building on that very spot just a few feet in front of me. That caused Pete to lose focus for a minute. Roger knocked him down. When Pete came back to the corner, his trainer, George Benton, asked him if he was all right. Pete replied, "Well, I could use a Bud right about now."

Whenever one of Pete's stablemates lost a fight, he would be sure to promise all of the Duvas that he would "save the family." Recently, I had to reprimand him for trying to entice fighters who were already signed with other promoters to come and join the family at Main Events. And I remember hearing him yell at my husband to get him tougher fights because he could not be bothered with preparing to fight the easy ones for a payday.

Sometimes Pete demonstrated that he could throw shade just as well as he could throw punches. Years before his match with Felix Trinidad was arranged, a reporter asked Pete, "What do you think of Trinidad?" Pete thought for a moment and then responded, "Trinidad? No. Not interested. I like to take my vacations right here in the U S of A!"

One night, he advised a cash-strapped friend in the VIP section of a club that he should go back to coach where he belonged!

And then there was the legendary story of the time Pete sparred with a young Floyd Mayweather. I am a believer that gym stories should stay in the gym. But let's just say that the best fighter of his generation did not lay a glove on Sweet Pea – who kept his hands behind his back the whole time.

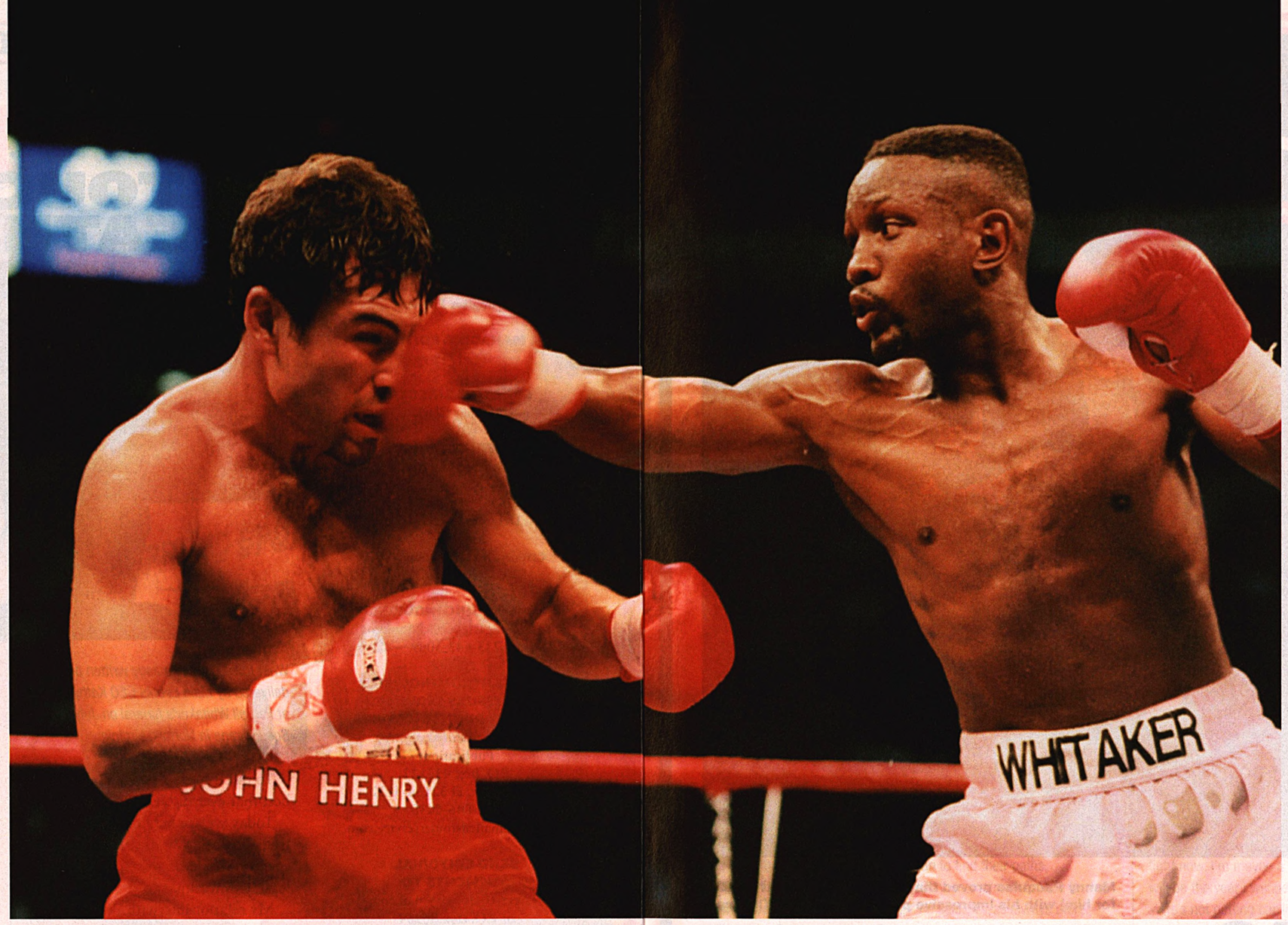
Like many extraordinary people, Pete also wrestled with his demons. And I know that he could be a royal pain in the ass to the very people who were closest to him and who loved him the most. You all know it's true! But we in boxing were the lucky ones, because he always brought us his best.

And so I choose to remember that part of Pernell. Dipping and diving. Duck-walking under De La Hoya's punches. Jabbing Azumah Nelson into submission. Entering the arena with the Norfolk State Marching Band. Knocking Diosbelys Hurtado right out of the ring. Turning Chavez around so many times that it made ME dizzy to watch! Standing firmly in the pocket while making everyone he fought miss over and over and over again. Floating around the blue canvas as if he were a cloud on air.

We will miss him. And there will never be another like him.

I hope that you have finally found peace, Sweet Pea, in a place where you always vanquish your opponents and they raise your hand in victory every day.

He was the best that ever did it.



Many believe Whitaker deserved the decision vs. De La Hoya.

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES ★ AND MORE!

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

MANNY PACQUIAO

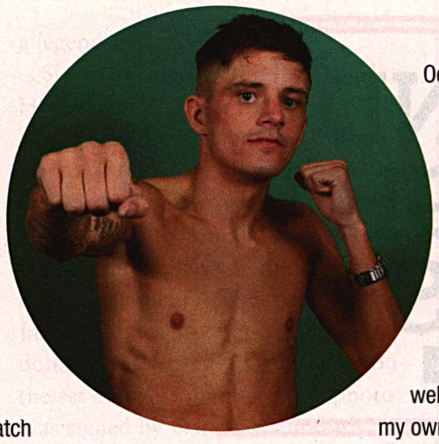
Manny Pacquiao proved that 40 is the new 30 (at least for him) with his impressive points victory over Thurman.

The twilight of Manny Pacquiao's career is like an Arctic summer sun that never fully sets. He has seemingly been on his way out since his rivalry with Juan Manuel Marquez concluded with him face down on the canvas in December 2012. Losses to Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Jeff Horn (controversial or not) convinced his critics that he was finished as a world-class fighter. Yet here is Pacquiao, at the age of 40, still fighting and proving detractors wrong. His split-decision victory over welterweight standout Keith Thurman proved that he has more in his tank than most would expect of someone who turned pro in 1995. Any concerns that Thurman would blow through his older, smaller opponent were put to rest near the end of Round 1, when Pacquiao caught the undefeated beltholder with a right hook that put the 30-year-old on his back. Thurman worked his way back into the fight, landing right hands that would have felled other top welterweights, but Pacquiao persisted, turning the tide for good in Round 10 with a left to the body that doubled Thurman over and left him diminished for the remainder of the fight. Now in possession of the WBA title, his fourth reign at 147 pounds, Pacquiao has seen a rebirth of his career under the Premier Boxing Champions banner. Coupled with his January decision over Adrien Broner, the Thurman victory might be strong enough to earn him Fighter of the Year consideration, an almost unheard-of feat for a 40-year-old veteran. RING

NEW FACES

LEE MCGREGOR

By Anson Wainwright



From a young age, Scottish bantamweight Lee McGregor was involved in sports. But he enjoyed soccer while it was his older brother, Connor (not to be confused with MMA star Conor McGregor), who boxed.

"My dad was a big boxing fan and used to watch it on the TV in the Scott Harrison (who held the WBO featherweight title twice between 2002-2006) days," McGregor told The Ring. "That was my first sort of memory of boxing, and then I started to get involved myself a few years after that.

"I wasn't watching and going to the gym; I was having a mess about in the house with my brother, and my dad would get us up on the pads. It wasn't until a few years later we went up to Clovenstone Amateur Boxing Club. I just messed about like a young boy."

Initially, McGregor was a bit shy and unsure of boxing due to a skin disorder, psoriasis. After a while, he decided to give boxing a go.

"I kept thinking about going back up to the boxing club and had my first amateur fight in May 2012," said the 22-year-old. "I was 15. And it kind of went off from there."

At first, he was known as "Connor's younger brother." But then things really took off.

"After 10 fights, people started to take notice, and I got my own name," he said. "After 11 fights, I won the Scottish Open championships, and in my 12th fight I won the GB Open championship; I boxed my now-teammate Sunny Edwards in the finals. I was a raw novice. It was crazy. I was flying."

While he found solitude in boxing, life was difficult outside the ring. In a year from hell, four family members passed away, including his mother and grandfather, who heavily influenced his boxing career. It was then that he and his brother began to find their paths.

"It was like someone was saying, 'Connor, you're not made for the boxing, Lee's made for the boxing,'" he said. "I was always more skillful than Connor, because Connor liked to brawl. He couldn't contain himself. It's like we were guided."

McGregor threw himself into boxing and was part of the hugely successful team GB set up in Sheffield, England, and was selected to represent Scotland at the AIBA Youth World Championships in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2014.

As well as domestic success, he did well internationally. He fought at the 2017 World Championships in Hamburg, Germany, losing to eventual silver medalist Duke Ragan in the second round.

The experience shaped the next part of his career.

"The World Championships were huge," he said. "I'd only had about 40 fights going away to this tournament, and the guys I'm competing against are like Olympians and Olympic medalists, world champions with 200, 300 amateur fights."

McGregor didn't want to wait until 2020 for the Olympics and switched to the professional ranks in November 2017. His progression in the pro ranks was swift. In just his fifth outing, in October 2018, he won the Commonwealth title.

"I just think I was proving I was ready," he said. "And if you're proving you're ready to do it and sparring 10, 12 rounds in the gym and you're carrying it on into fight nights and looking good and blasting people away … In my first couple of fights I knocked guys out in the first and second round, and I needed stepping up.

"I was sparring lightweights and junior welterweights in the gym and more than holding my own. I feel like my team knew I was ready for being stepped up. My mentality is I want to face the best and get to the top as quick as I can."

After initially signing with Barry McGuigan's Cyclone Promotions, McGregor recently realigned himself with MTK Global and is back in Sheffield under Grant Smith's watch. He defended his title for the first time in a grudge match with fellow Scotsman Scott Allan and is due to return in September in preparation for a clash with another countryman, Ukashir Farooq, who holds the British title. The plan is for them to meet by the end of the year.

"As a kid I've dreamed about (being) British and Commonwealth champion," said McGregor (7-0, 6 knockouts). "It sounds crazy, because I'm one or two fights from being that. It's already coming true."

His ambitions don't end there, however. McGregor's appearance in a six-rounder on the Naoya Inoue-Emmanuel Rodriguez World Boxing Super Series undercard in May helped serve as further motivation.

"I think Inoue is very, very special," he explained. "I believe by the time I get to world level, he will be elsewhere, probably unifying in another weight class, because he's that special and he's that good, and that's where he's going to get his challenges – at the weights above. But it did whet my appetite.

"The Paul Butlers and Jason Moloneys, they're the kind of guys I believe I'm not far away from. I think I'd give Butler and Moloney a fight now. I'm maybe a couple of fights away. I want to push on. 2020 will be the year I will become world champion."

He's not getting carried away, though.

"I've got a lot of work to do," said McGregor. "Kash Farooq is no mug, and whoever wins that fight between us won't be far away from European and world title opportunities."

In the meantime, he's reconnecting with his first passion through his success in the boxing ring.

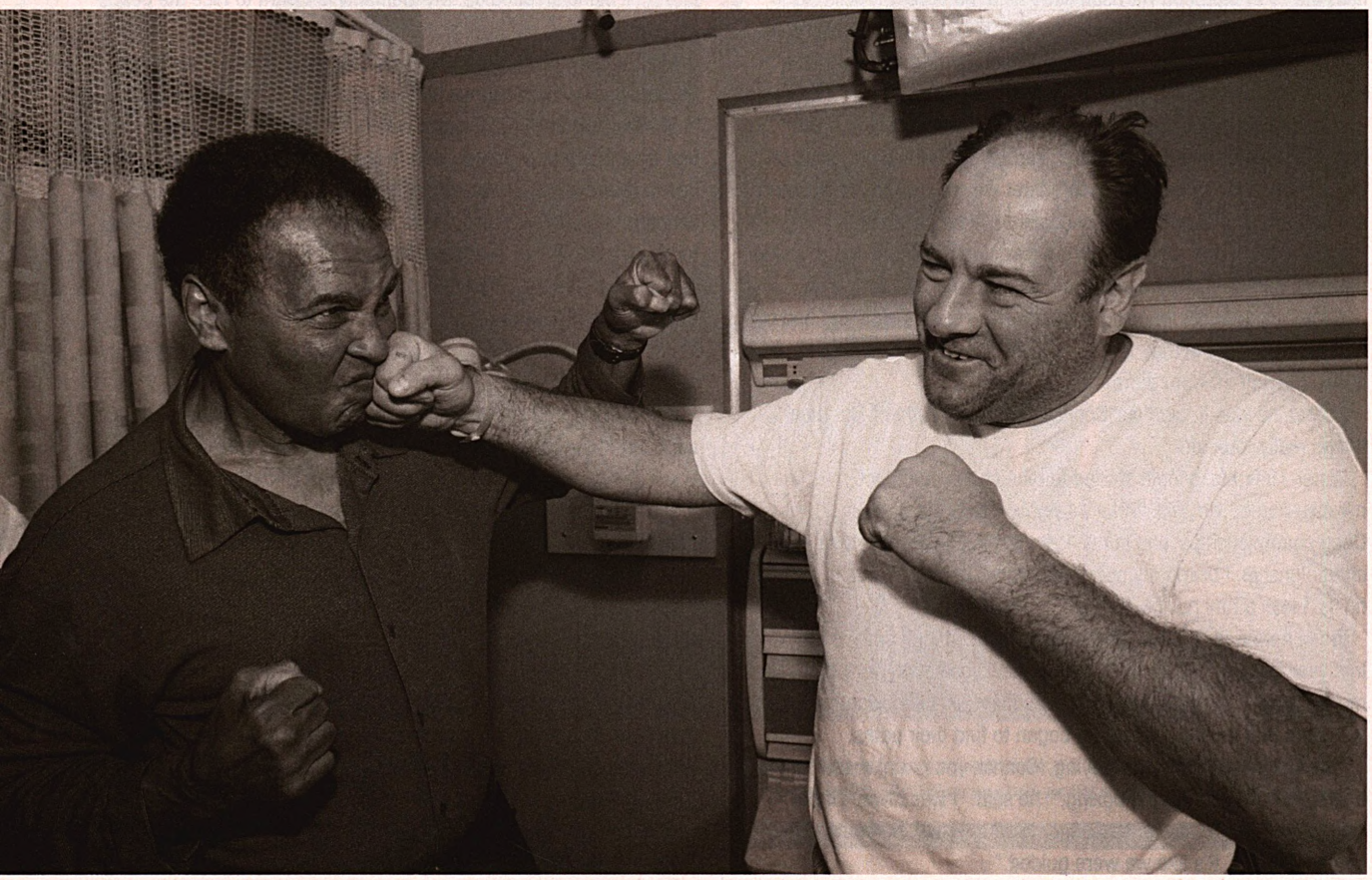
"I'm a Hearts (soccer team in Edinburgh) supporter, and they're backing me very well," said McGregor. "I'm getting on the [field] parading my belts – it's really helping my publicity and growing my fan base.

"My dream would be Tynecastle (stadium), but as long as the whole city was behind me, I wouldn't care where it is. I want the whole of the country to support me, not just the half of Edinburgh. I believe I'm going to bring very big, special nights to Scotland."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER



No surprise that James Gandolfini (who has the look of a '40s/'50s-era heavyweight pug) was thrilled to meet Ali on the set of *The Sopranos*.

WHEN MUHAMMAD ALI MET TONY SOPRANO

Muhammad Ali was real. Tony Soprano wasn't. But they shared a bond as cultural icons and met, so to speak, under memorable circumstances.

The catalyst was Jules Feiler, who now owns The Pitching Staff, a New York-based public relations firm. In early 2006, Feiler was working on a project with Rasheda Ali (one of Muhammad's daughters) when Rasheda telephoned him and said, "I'm in New York with my dad, and he's bored. Can you think of something that would be fun for him to do?"

One of Feiler's clients at the time was Michael Imperioli, who played Christopher Moltisanti on *The Sopranos*. Jules telephoned Imperioli and asked, "How would you like to have dinner with Muhammad Ali tonight?"

"And he couldn't do it," Feiler recalls, "because they were in the middle of shooting an episode. But Michael said, if we wanted, he'd send an HBO van over to the hotel where we were staying to bring us to the set at Silvercup Studios."

"I was a huge fan of the show," Rasheda adds. "And Daddy had

watched it a few times. I asked him if he wanted to go, and he was all for it."

The average person couldn't just walk onto the set of *The Sopranos*. But Muhammad Ali wasn't an average person.

"They were on a break when we got there," Feiler remembers. "Some actors and crew people were sitting outside, smoking cigarettes. Michael and Steven Van Zandt (who played Silvio) came out to greet us. They were shooting an episode where Tony was in the hospital after he'd been shot by Uncle Junior. They brought us inside. James Gandolfini was sitting in a hospital bed. Remember, Tony was in a coma for several episodes that season. Anyway, James is sitting there dressed in a hospital gown splattered with blood, reading a newspaper, and didn't look up. Ali walked over and smacked the newspaper. James ignored him. He didn't even look up to see who it was. So Ali smacked the paper again. James looked up, blurted out 'HOLY FUCK!' and jumped out of bed to hug Ali."

"It was fun," Rasheda says. "Obviously, everyone wanted to meet daddy, and he wanted to meet them. He was always intrigued by actors who played gangsters, and he had all sorts of questions. He asked James Gandolfini if he was a gangster in real life, and James said no, he was just acting."

A photographer named Shahar Azran was there and took some photos of Ali and Gandolfini together. Then Gandolfini realized that he couldn't be photographed wearing a hospital gown, because the script was top secret and no one outside of the inner circle was supposed to know that Tony Soprano was in the hospital. So he changed into gym pants and a white T-shirt, and Azran took some more photos.

What does the photographer remember about that day?

At one point, Gandolfini nodded toward Ali and told Azran, "That's the difference between a celebrity and a legend."

Six years later, the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas hosted a gala dinner to celebrate Ali's 70th birthday. A charity auction was included in the festivities. Lorenzo Fertitta paid $1.1 million for the gloves that Ali wore in his 1965 title defense against Floyd Patterson. James Gandolfini attended and donated three photographs taken on the set of *The Sopranos*. Each photo was signed by Gandolfini and Ali.

★★★

Claressa Shields won gold medals at the 2012 and 2016 Olympics and has amassed more than her share of professional titles. Earlier this year, she told TMZ, "I spar with men. I drop men. I bust [men's] noses. I beat men up all the time. They may be stronger than me, but their boxing ability isn't like mine. I think I can beat up Keith Thurman. I really do. GGG, he's older now. I could give GGG a run for his money. Power for power isn't a question, because what is boxing? Boxing is the sweet science. It's not about strength."

About Claressa's statement that she drops men: As of this writing, Shields has compiled a 9-0 record in the professional ranks. And while she has scored two stoppages, she has never knocked down an opponent.

★★★

Longtime boxing writer Norm Frauenheim was chatting with Roberto Duran over dinner in Las Vegas earlier this year when "Manos de Piedra" began reminiscing about a 2001 automobile accident in Argentina that almost cost him his life.

"I was in a coma for two months," Duran recounted, underlining the gravity of his condition.

"Two months?" Frauenheim said incredulously.

Duran shrugged and responded, "Two months, two weeks, two days, two hours ... It was a coma, OK?"

For the record, in Duran's 2016 autobiography, *I Am Duran*, Roberto recounts that he was "dead on the operating table for 30 seconds" and went into cardiac arrest "for two or three minutes." No mention of a coma.

★★★

Golden Boy fights in Las Vegas don't feel the same without Don Chargin there.

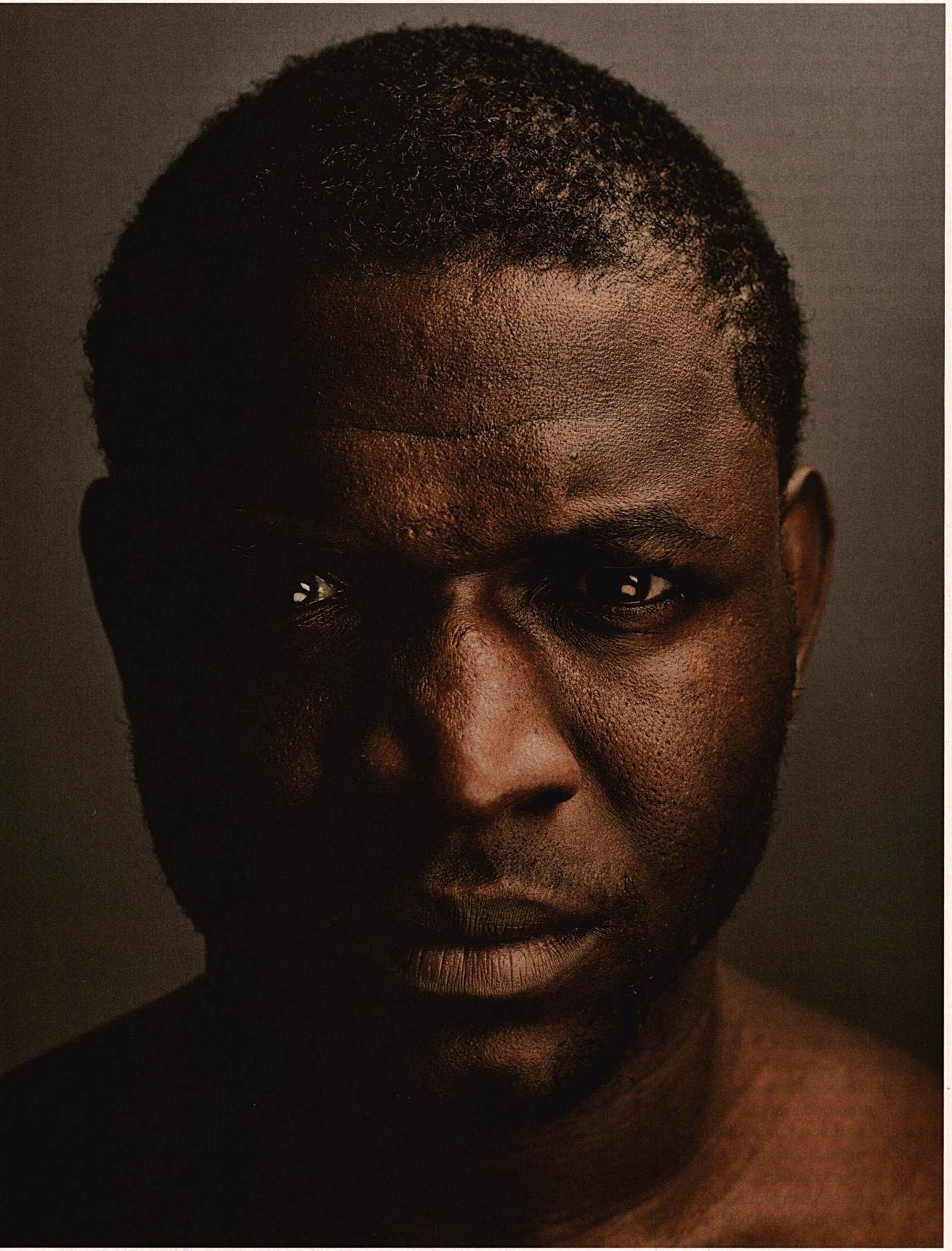
Chargin, who died last year at age 90, promoted fights for more than six decades, most notably in California with Aileen Eaton and later his wife, Lorraine. He helped build Golden Boy into a promotional power and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2001.

Chargin was generous in sharing his knowledge with writers, fighters, managers – even rival promoters. And he always had a good tale to tell.

One of my favorite Don Chargin stories involves an incident that occurred at Pittsburgh International Airport. Don was walking down a corridor when his suitcase opened and the contents spilled out onto the floor. Moments like that are embarrassing. Personal belongings roll away. Fellow travelers in a hurry to get to where they're going walk by, chuckling at your plight.

Don was on his knees, gathering his belongings when a pleasant-looking man came up from behind, stopped, and said, "Let me help you with that." They finished the chore together. Don thanked him and then realized that the good samaritan was Arnold Palmer.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Protect Yourself at All Times – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

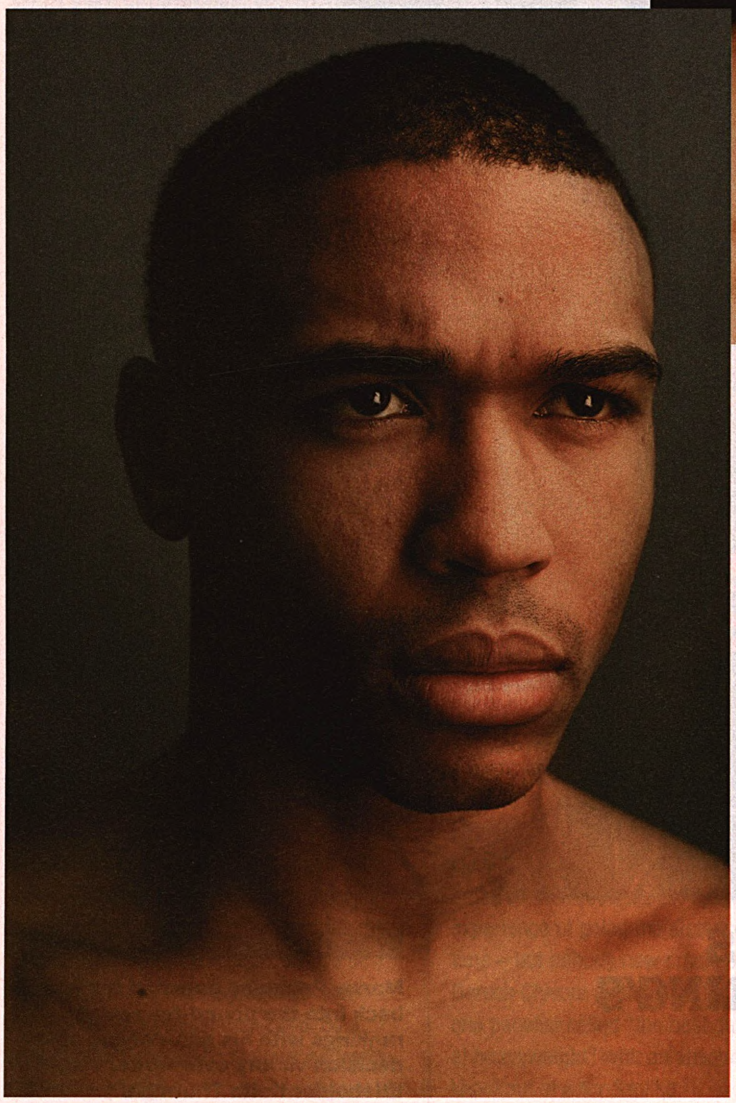


THE FACE OF BOXING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK**

TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

AT A CLUB FIGHT CARD WEIGH-IN



Let the mind wander, and one can draw a parallel between a slave auction and the weigh-in for a fight. Grown men are stripped of their clothing, appraised and examined preparatory to their bodies being sold. If one prefers a more obvious analogy, gladiatorial combat will suffice.

The photographs on these pages have a timeless aura about them. They were taken at the weigh-in for a club fight card promoted by DiBella Entertainment earlier this year in New York. Former national Golden Gloves champion Brian Ceballo (center) is a prospect. Joseph Williams (facing page), like Ceballo, is undefeated but has a more limited horizon in the professional ranks. Calvin Metcalf came to New York as an opponent.

For a select few, boxing offers a road to immortality. But it's a perilous journey, and few travelers reach that destination. RING

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RATINGS
SUMMARY

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF JULY 20, 2019

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

Manny Pacquiao punched his way back into the pound-for-pound rankings with his age-defying split-decision victory over welterweight titleholder Keith Thurman.

POUND FOR POUND

Love it or hate it, this is the list that captures the hearts and minds of the common folk, and no single fighter does the same like Manny Pacquiao. When he faked us all out with retirement and gave up his No. 7 rank in 2016, he'd been in the Top 10 for almost 12½ years straight. But even though the hiatus only lasted a few months, there was no real campaign to get him back in after outpointing Jessie Vargas. The general attitude was that Manny might stick around, but his P4P days were probably over. And then the 40-year-old dynamo goes and beats Keith Thurman.

The voice of the panel was pretty much unanimous this time: Bring him back to replace Donnie Nietes at No. 10. The reasons included Thurman, yes, but also a good dose of awe for Pacquiao's pre-Vargas resume. One dissenting panelist took a more dispassionate approach and pointed out: "Donnie Nietes hasn't lost a fight in 15 years, and despite him not having Manny's glam, that cannot be ignored. … What I've asked myself is, do I really believe that Pacquiao is one of the Top 10 best boxers in the world regardless of weight class? The answer that came back is no." It's always hard to tell with Pacquiao-related decisions – is the head or the heart speaking? Either way is equally unreliable once he gets in the ring. But he clearly has not stopped being amazing, and he had the votes, so Pac at 10 it is.

Former WBO heavyweight titleholder Joseph Parker held onto his No. 8 ranking with a 10th-round stoppage of ridiculously tough Alex Leapai.

HEAVYWEIGHTS

Former titleholder Joseph Parker (No. 8) continued his recovery from a pair of losses with a 10th-round stoppage of Alex Leapai (unrated), who, although he somehow stayed on his feet, absorbed too many unanswered punches for referee Ricky Gonzalez to let the fight continue. It was Parker's first bout under the Matchroom banner, with promoter Eddie Hearn possibly maneuvering him into a rematch with Anthony Joshua, who took the Kiwi's WBO belt in March of last year. In an interesting twist, however, that belt now encircles the famous waist of Andy Ruiz Jr., whose only loss was a razor-thin majority decision against Parker in December 2016. So a grudge match could still happen, just with a different grudge.

Dillian Whyte, the fifth wheel of the division's top half, fought past a ninth-round knockdown to win a decision against the previously undefeated Oscar Rivas, but the victory was under a developing cloud at press time due to Whyte allegedly failing a drug test and Rivas' camp not being informed of the result.

Several skirmishes also took place just outside the gate in mid-July – Daniel Dubois, Tony Yoka and Joe Joyce all bettered their records; Efe Ajagba got the experience of going the distance for the first time – but nobody new cracked the Top 10. Dereck Chisora established himself as what one panelist called "the best gatekeeper at heavyweight" with an absolutely vicious knockout of Artur Szpilka.

CRUISERWEIGHTS

Denis Lebedev's later career was confusing – he had a loss to Guillermo Jones switched to a no-contest after Jones tested positive for a banned substance, and he spent some time as the WBA's "champion in recess" – so it's difficult to say how may times he actually held a belt and for how long, but the Russian was undeniably a top player in a big-name division for the better part of his 18-year run, which he officially ended in July with a record of 32-2 (23 KOs). He was rated at No. 4, so a spot opened up at No. 10 after everyone moved up to fill the gap; it was claimed by undefeated Belgian Yves Ngabu.

Lawrence Okolie continued his development and held his position at No.

Jermall Charlo blasts unrated Brandon Adams with an uppercut en route to a unanimous decision victory, which allowed him to hold his No. 5 spot in the middleweight rankings.

9 after chasing down Mariano Gudino for a seventh-round TKO.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Isaac Chilemba (unrated) is the hardest-working gatekeeper in boxing – his most recent opponents have been, in order: Eleider Alvarez, Sergey Kovalev, Oleksandr Gvozdyk, Blake Caparello and Dmitry Bivol. Granted, most of those guys already owned nice homes inside the gate, but Chilemba stands ready to test all would-be contenders, even if he himself is showing signs of decline. The latest to come knocking was Maksim Vlasov, who also wanted a bit of revenge on top of the key – Chilemba had taken his perfect record back in 2011 – and got both with a unanimous decision in Russia. With the win, Vlasov replaced Sven Fornling at No. 10.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

No changes.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Hype is a fickle benefactor, and its attention had wandered a bit from Jermall Charlo after the story of his last fight wasn't that he was impressive in beating Matt Korobov, but that Korobov was sort of impressive in losing. Charlo was more dominant against unrated Brandon Adams, who won *The Contender* in the rebooted TV series' latest season, but the Texan's fans would again be denied their pyrotechnic ending after Charlo reportedly hurt his hand in the second round and cruised to victory on his boxing skills after that. He missed a shutout by one point on the cards but kept his spot at No. 5 on our list. If anything, it was the WBC that truly upped its game during fight week, further pissing on the concept of champions by bestowing its newest creation, the "franchise champion" belt, on its plain-old champion, Canelo Alvarez, which meant that Charlo, the "interim champion," inherited his belt and Charlo-Adams became a title defense. At this point, the sanctioning organization could open up a side business making sparkly cat toys and it would be just as meaningful (though probably not as profitable).

Demetrius Andrade (No. 4 last month) held onto his WBO title with a true shutout of No. 8-rated Maciej Sulecki – 120-107 across the board – but the method was criticized by some as boring. One ratings panel member defended the Rhode Islander, pointing out that "once he gets into a rhythm, he locks downs wins making opponents look ordinary." All agreed that Andrade's Andrade-esque boxing clinic was impressive enough to raise him to No. 3; Sulecki dropped to No. 10.

Ryota Murata jumped from No. 9 to No. 5 after avenging his loss to Rob Brant last October with a second-round TKO on July 12. Murata should probably just try to convince himself that every one of his opponents in the future has already beaten him, because rematches seem to bring out the best in the Japanese Olympic gold medalist (he also knocked out Hassan N'Dam – the first to do so – after losing a controversial split decision). Brant, who fell from No. 4 to No. 10, was stunned by a monster right-cross counter and then spent the next 90 seconds getting ragdolled around the ring until referee Luis Pabon stepped in. In fact, according to CompuBox, the 64 power punches landed by Murata in the round comprised the second-highest tally on record for a middleweight, surpassed only by the 74 landed by Mike McCallum in the fifth and final round of his win over Nicky Walker in 1991.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Jermell Charlo (No. 7) nearly sent Jorge Cota (unrated) through the ropes – actually through, not between – with the force of a right hook, but referee Jady sent the groggy Mexican back into battle to be short-circuited by a right cross – a highlight-reel finish but totally unnecessary.

Charlo's first-round knockout of Erickson Lubin (No. 10 last month) was a sensation in 2017, but Lubin has come back with three knockouts since his only loss. The latest stepping stone was unrated Frenchman Zakaria Attou, whose corner threw in the towel after seeing him fall under a hail of

punches in Round 4. The win lifted Lubin to No. 9, with Kell Brook sinking to the bottom spot.

With a solid unanimous decision victory over Patrick Day, Carlos Adames became a favorite among panelists to be next in. Liam Williams also settled further into the weight by becoming the first man to end Karim Achour's night early, which he did in Round 2 with the follow-up to a jarring right-hook knockdown.

WELTERWEIGHTS

Jeff Horn (No. 8 last month) moved up in weight, so his removal cleared a space for undefeated Uzbekistani Kudratillo Abdukakhorov at No. 10. Among those still outside the Top 10, Amir Khan unsurprisingly stopped Billy Dib in four and Jamal James notched a UD over Antonio DeMarco.

The biggest story in the division, of course, was Pacquiao-Thurman (in which both fighters were somehow introduced as the WBA welterweight champion), but as stoked as everyone was about Pacquiao's performance, upward movement from his No. 5 position was halted at No. 3 because of Errol Spence and Terence Crawford holding 1 and 2 respectively. What the senator does next is now the question. Thurman, who dropped from No. 3 to No. 4, naturally wants a rematch. Manny … wants to make the people happy. Floyd Mayweather was lurking in the ring before the fight, but thankfully there was no posturing for a sequel to the "fight of the century" afterward.

On the undercard, No. 7-rated Yordenis Ugas dominated Omar Figueroa Jr., handing the Texan his first loss via unanimous decision, and No. 9-rated Sergey Lipinets got a second-round stoppage of Jayar Inson, who replaced John Molina the day before the fight after Molina hurt his back. Both held their positions on the list.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

Subriel Matias forced then-undefeated Maxim Dadashev's corner, led by Buddy McGirt, to stop the fight in the break after the 11th round, and the Puerto Rican entered the list at No. 8, pushing No. 10-rated Jose Zepeda out. Matias, also undefeated, dominated the contest and deserves the ranking. But it's hideous to talk about this like a reward that surely Matias wants less than anyone. Dadashev, 28 years old, collapsed after the fight and died in the hospital four days later due to the brain trauma he sustained.

WBO titleholder Demetirus Andrade defeated his first Ring-rated 160-pounder, Maciej Sulecki, which advanced him to No. 3 in the rankings.

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Richard Commey had his doubters on the ratings panel during the past couple years, but his recent performances have been justifying his No. 1 ranking and gaining him some fans. One panelist even said that the Bronx-based Ghanaian is "becoming one of my favorite boxers" after his eighth-round knockout of Ray Beltran (unrated) via left hook.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

Eduardo "Rocky" Hernandez (No. 9 last month) was shockingly knocked out in the first round by unheralded Venezuelan Roger Gutierrez and was removed from the list. Nicaragua's Rene Alvarado, who knocked out Gutierrez in 2017, entered at No. 10.

FEATHERWEIGHTS

Olympic silver medalist Shakur Stevenson (No. 9 last month) continued to impress in his 12th pro fight, albeit against a late substitution in two-time bantamweight title challenger Alberto Guevara. But hey, looking good is looking good, so Stevenson was promoted to No. 7. That rank was previously occupied by Abner Mares, but Mares hasn't fought since June 2018 and was removed, which created a vacancy at No. 10; it was taken by the undefeated Joet Gonzalez, who also looked good knocking out fellow Californian Manuel Avila (unrated) in Round 6.

Rey Vargas didn't appease Southern California fans, but he did outpoint junior featherweight contender Tomoki Kameda to retain his WBC title.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

It's impossible to know anything about Guillermo Rigondeaux's moods, but the stone-faced Cuban has seemed a little cranky since being dominated by Vasiliy Lomachenko in December 2017. After taking a year off, Rigo returned with a first-round KO of easy mark Giovanni Delgado. But in the co-feature to Charlo-Cota in June, he faced former titleholder and hard-headed knockout specialist Julio Ceja (unrated). The ferocious version of "The Jackal" showed up again, standing and trading until a spiteful left hook floored the Mexican in the eighth round. The former pound-for-pounder didn't move from his spot at No. 4 on the list, but it was another sign that he might be making a late-career push – whether motivated by redemption or an awareness of his own moneymaking shelf-life – to use the more crowd-pleasing side of his formidable skillset. He's already on pace to fight three times in one year, something that hasn't happened since 2012.

Rey Vargas held his position at No. 2 after defending his WBC belt with a crowd-displeasing unanimous decision over Tomoki Kameda, who slipped one spot to No. 7.

BANTAMWEIGHTS

Nordine Oubaali (No. 5 last month) defended his title with a stoppage of unrated Arthur Villanueva, who was dropped by a two-handed counter midway through the sixth round and became a punching bag after that. One panelist felt the Frenchman should be at No. 3 above Nonito Donaire, whose win over Ryan Burnett last year he called "fluky," but Oubaali's rise was checked at No. 4.

Luis Nery (No. 2 last month) dropped Juan Carlos Payano (unrated) with a textbook liver shot – the kind that leaves a guy writhing on the canvas with no thought of getting up – in the ninth round of their fight on the Pacquiao-Thurman card. Nery was lifted to No. 1.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

Khalid Yafai (No. 3 last month) notched a comfortably wide unanimous decision over unrated Norbelto Jimenez and remains undefeated, but the Brit's uninspiring performance caused some disagreement on the panel. One member likened Yafai to "an English Ivan Calderon" – meaning skillful in the most boring sense – but that triggered a harsh response from another, who said Yafai is nothing at all like Calderon and, more succinctly: "I think Yafai is ass." The same panel member went on to say, "I think (No. 4-rated) Kazuto Ioka's three-bout resume at 115 pounds trumps Yafai's entire career. And yes, I thought he beat Donnie Nietes, but even a competitive loss Nietes is better than anything Yafai has done." The anti-Calderon comparison voice carried the day, and Yafai and Ioka switched places.

FLYWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

Ken Shiro's DLHQ (De La Hoya Quotient – a score based on the disparity between affection inspired by a fighter's smile and the damage caused by his fists) might currently be the highest in the sport. He also already has an impressive legacy with just 16 pro fights: six defenses of his WBC title, none of them against pushovers. The latest was a fourth-round stoppage of Jonathan Taconing, who had never been stopped before. As the No. 1-rated 108-pounder, Shiro only has one man above him: the division champion, Hiroto Kyoguchi. Both are undefeated. Enough said.

STRAWWEIGHTS

Former WBO titleholder Tatsuya Fukuhara (No. 8 last month) announced his retirement and departs the game at age 30 with a 21-7-6 (7 KOs) record. The vacancy that opened up at No. 10 as a result was claimed by Wilfredo Mendez, who at press time was slated to face Vic Saludar for the aforementioned strap on August 24.

RATINGS

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF JULY 20, 2019

Pacquiao's win over Thurman didn't just get him back in the pound-for-pound top 10, it pushed the veteran to No. 3 in the welterweight rankings.

1 VASILIY LOMACHENKO
Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

2 TERENCE CRAWFORD
U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

4 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)

5 ALEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

6 ERROL SPENCE JR.
U.S. • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)

7 GENNADIY GOLOVKIN
Kazakhstan • 39-1-1 (35 KOs)

8 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)

9 MIKEY GARCIA
U.S. • 39-1-0 (30 KOs)

10 MANNY PACQUIAO
Philippines • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)

1 TYSON FURY
U.K. • 28-0-1 (20 KOs)

2 DEONTAY WILDER
U.S. • 41-0-1 (40 KOs)

3 ANDY RUIZ JR.
U.S. • 33-1-0 (22 KOs)

4 ANTHONY JOSHUA
U.K. • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)

5 DILLIAN WHYTE
U.K. • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)

6 LUIS ORTIZ
Cuba • 31-1-0 (26 KOs)

7 ALEXANDER POVETKIN
Russia • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)

8 JOSEPH PARKER
New Zealand • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)

9 ADAM KOWNACKI
U.S. • 19-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 KUBRAT PULEV
Bulgaria • 27-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C ALEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS
Latvia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

2 MURAT GASSIEV
Russia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

3 YUNIER DORTICOS
Cuba • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

4 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)

5 KEVIN LERENA
S. Africa • 23-1-0 (10 KOs)

6 ILUNGA MAKABU
Congo • 25-2-0 (24 KOs)

7 ANDREW TABITI
U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

8 ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN
France • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

9 LAWRENCE OKOLIE
U.K. • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

10 YVES NGABU
Belgium • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)

2 SERGEY KOVALEV
Russia • 33-3-1 (28 KOs)

3 DMITRY BIVOL
Russia • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 14-0-0 (14 KOs)

5 MARCUS BROWNE
U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)

6 ELEIDER ALVAREZ
Colombia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

7 BADOU JACK
Sweden • 22-2-3 (13 KOs)

8 JESSE HART
U.S. • 26-2-0 (21 KOs)

9 SULLIVAN BARRERA
Cuba • 22-3-0 (14 KOs)

10 MAKSIM VLASOV
Russia • 44-3-0 (26 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C CALLUM SMITH
U.K. • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)

1 GILBERTO RAMIREZ
Mexico • 40-0-0 (26 KOs)

2 DAVID BENAVIDEZ
U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)

3 CALEB PLANT
U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 ANTHONY DIRRELL
U.S. • 33-1-1 (24 KOs)

5 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

6 CHRIS EUBANK JR.
U.K. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

7 JOSE UZCATEGUI
Venezuela • 28-3-0 (23 KOs)

8 CALEB TRUAX
U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)

9 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
U.K. • 28-0-0 (13 KOs)

10 AVNI YILDIRIM
Turkey • 21-2-0 (12 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of July 20, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)
- **1 GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** Kaz. • 39-1-1 (35 KOs)
- **2 DANIEL JACOBS** U.S. • 35-3-0 (29 KOs)
- **3 DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** U.S. • 28-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **4 JERMALL CHARLO** U.S. • 29-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **5 RYOTA MURATA** Japan • 15-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **6 SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **7 DAVID LEMIEUX** Canada • 40-4-0 (34 KOs)
- **8 KAMIL SZEREMETA** Poland • 19-0-0 (4 KOs)
- **9 MACIEJ SULECKI** Poland • 28-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **10 ROB BRANT** U.S. • 25-2-0 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 JULIAN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 27-1-1 (16 KOs)
- **2 JARRETT HURD** U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **3 ERISLANDY LARA** Cuba • 25-3-3 (14 KOs)
- **4 JAIME MUNGUIA** Mexico • 33-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **5 BRIAN CASTANO** Argentina • 15-0-1 (11 KOs)
- **6 TONY HARRISON** U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 32-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **8 MICHEL SORO** France • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)
- **9 ERICKSON LUBIN** U.S. • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **10 KELL BROOK** U.K. • 38-2-0 (26 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ERROL SPENCE JR.** U.S. • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2 TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **3 MANNY PACQUIAO** Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4 KEITH THURMAN** U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5 SHAWN PORTER** U.S. • 30-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **6 DANNY GARCIA** U.S. • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 YORDENIS UGAS** Cuba • 24-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **8 EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** Lithuania • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **9 SERGEY LIPINETS** Russia • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **10 KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV** Uzbekistan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 REGIS PROGRAIS** U.S. • 24-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **2 JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3 JOSE RAMIREZ** U.S. • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **4 MAURICE HOOKER** U.S. • 26-0-3 (17 KOs)
- **5 IVAN BARANCHYK** Russia • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6 VIKTOR POSTOL** Ukraine • 31-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **7 KIRYL RELIKH** Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **8 SUBRIEL MATIAS** Puerto Rico • 14-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **9 YVES ULYSSE** Canada • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **10 EDUARD TROYANOVSKY** Russia • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)

Yordenis Ugas held onto his No. 7 welterweight ranking with a one-sided unanimous decision over former lightweight beltholder Omar Figueroa Jr.

Shakur Stevenson impressively handled former title challenger Alberto Guevara and gained a couple spots in the featherweight rankings.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C VASILIY LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1 RICHARD COMMEY** Ghana • 29-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **2 LUKE CAMPBELL** U.K. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **3 JOSE PEDRAZA** P.R. • 26-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **4 DEVIN HANEY** U.S. • 22-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **5 TEOFIMO LOPEZ** U.S. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **6 ROBERT EASTER** U.S. • 21-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **7 JAVIER FORTUNA** Dom. Rep. • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)
- **8 EMMANUEL TAGOE** Ghana • 30-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **9 ANTHONY CROLLA** U.K. • 34-7-3 (13 KOs)
- **10 RYAN GARCIA** U.S. • 18-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 MIGUEL BERCHELT** Mexico • 36-1-0 (32 KOs)
- **2 GERVONTA DAVIS** U.S. • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **3 TEVIN FARMER** U.S. • 29-4-1 (6 KOs)
- **4 ANDREW CANCIO** U.S. • 21-4-2 (16 KOs)
- **5 JAMEL HERRING** U.S. • 20-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **6 JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** U.S. • 29-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **7 MASAYUKI ITO** Japan • 25-2-1 (13 KOs)
- **8 MIGUEL ROMAN** Mexico • 61-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **9 FRANCISCO VARGAS** Mexico • 25-2-2 (18 KOs)
- **10 RENE ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 31-8-0 (20 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 LEO SANTA CRUZ** U.S. • 36-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2 JOSH WARRINGTON** U.K. • 29-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **3 GARY RUSSELL JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **4 OSCAR VALDEZ** Mexico • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **5 CARL FRAMPTON** U.K. • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **6 XU CAN** China • 17-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **7 SHAKUR STEVENSON** U.S. • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **8 TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR** Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9 KID GALAHAD** U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **10 JOET GONZALEZ** U.S. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 DANIEL ROMAN** U.S. • 27-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **2 REY VARGAS** Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3 EMANUEL NAVARRETE** Mexico • 27-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **4 GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** Cuba • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5 TJ DOHENY** Australia • 21-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6 RYOSUKE IWASA** Japan • 26-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **7 TOMOKI KAMEDA** Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **8 BRANDON FIGUEROA** U.S. • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **9 ISAAC DOGBOE** Ghana • 20-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **10 SHINGO WAKE** Japan • 26-5-2 (18 KOs)

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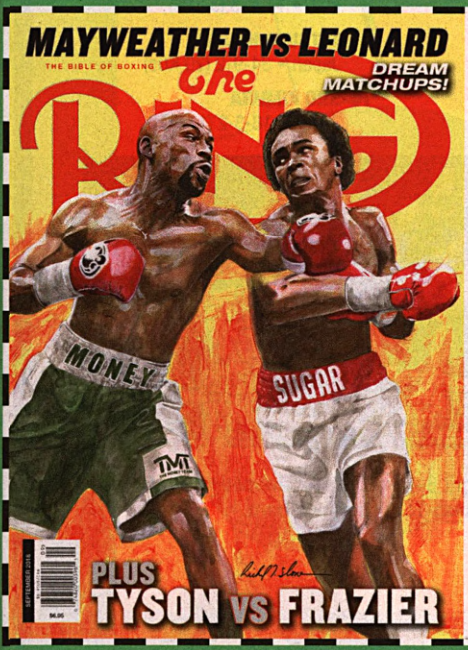

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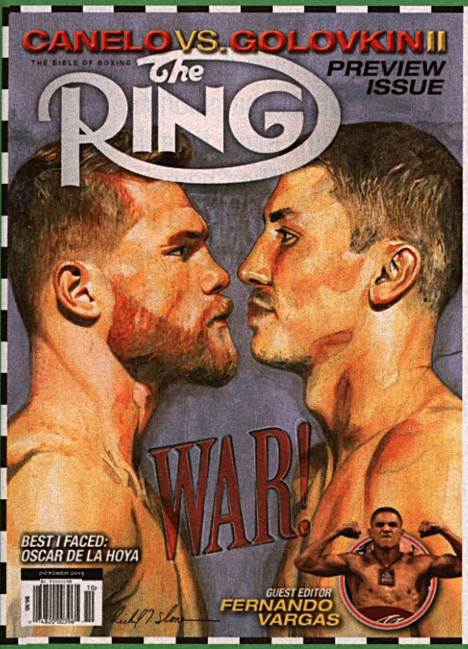

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RATINGS

Through fights of July 20, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)

1 LUIS NERY
Mexico • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)

2 ZOLANI TETE
S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)

3 NONITO DONAIRE
Phil. • 40-5-0 (26 KOs)

4 NORDINE OUBAALI
France • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

5 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)

6 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 19-1-0 (16 KOs)

7 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)

8 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 38-3-1 (27 KOs)

9 JOSHUA GREER
U.S. • 20-1-1 (12 KOs)

10 JOSHUA FRANCO
U.S. • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)

1 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 47-5-1 (41 KOs)

2 DONNIE NIETES
Phil. • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)

3 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)

4 KHALID YAFAI
U.K. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)

5 JERWIN ANCAJAS
Phil. • 31-1-2 (21 KOs)

6 ROMAN GONZALEZ
Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)

7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)

8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 31-4-1 (22 KOs)

9 ALEJANDRO BARRIOS
Mexico • 19-2-5 (9 KOs)

10 ASTON PALICTE
Phil. • 25-3-1 (21 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)

2 MORUTI MTHALANE
S. Africa • 38-2-0 (25 KOs)

3 ARTEM DALAKIAN
Ukraine • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)

4 JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ
Mexico • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)

5 CHARLIE EDWARDS
U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)

6 ANDREW SELBY
U.K. • 11-1-0 (6 KOs)

7 CRISTOFER ROSALES
Nicaragua • 28-4-0 (19 KOs)

8 MASAYUKI KURODA
Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)

9 RYOICHI TAGUCHI
Japan • 27-4-2 (12 KOs)

10 JUNTO NAKATANI
Japan • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C HIROTO KYOGUCHI
Japan • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)

1 KEN SHIRO
Japan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

2 HEKKIE BUDLER
S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)

3 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)

4 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)

5 ELWIN SOTO
Mexico • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)

6 ANGEL ACOSTA
P.R. • 20-2-0 (20 KOs)

7 MILAN MELINDO
Phil. • 37-4-0 (13 KOs)

8 EDWARD HENO
Phil. • 14-0-5 (5 KOs)

9 TETSUYA HISADA
Japan • 34-9-2 (20 KOs)

10 SHO KIMURA
Japan • 18-3-2 (11 KOs)

Erickson Lubin switched places with Kell Brook in the rankings after a fourth-round stoppage of Zakaria Attou.

No. 9- ranked welterweight Sergey Lipinets stopped late-sub Jayar Inson on the Pacquiao-Thurman undercard.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)

2 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
Thailand • 53-0-0 (18 KOs)

3 VIC SALUDAR
Phil. • 19-3-0 (10 KOs)

4 BYRON ROJAS
Nicaragua • 26-4-3 (11 KOs)

5 SIMPHIWE KHONCO
S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)

6 DEEJAY KRIEL
S. Africa • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)

7 JOSE ARGUMEDO
Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)

8 CARLOS LICONA
U.S. • 14-1-0 (2 KOs)

9 SAMUEL SALVA
Phil. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)

10 WILFREDO MENDEZ
Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

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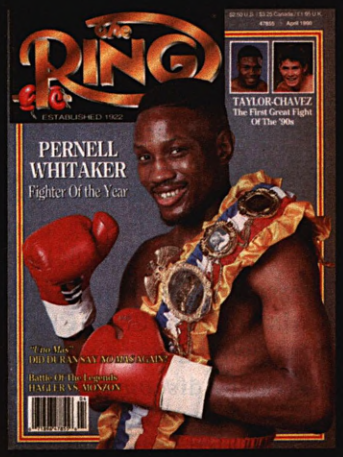
SWEET HEREAFTER

PERNELL WHITAKER WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR HIS INCOMPARABLE MIX OF TECHNICAL BRILLIANCE AND PURE SHOWMANSHIP

By **Ron Borges**

Pernell Whitaker was a geometric genius. He was Euclid in boxing boots. A master of angles inside the dangerous topography of a boxing ring, Whitaker was a mirage bordered by ropes and four corner posts. He often appeared in front of you only to vanish when your hands moved in his direction.

Willie Pep is widely regarded as the greatest defensive fighter in history, and perhaps he was, but Whitaker could not have been far behind the Will o' the Wisp when it came to mastery of the science of boxing. His grasp of the offensive side of perfect defense was his great gift, one that lifted him out of a rough Norfolk, Virginia, neighborhood called Young's Park to world titles in four weight classes, an Olympic gold medal he treasured more than the millions he made fighting and a place in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Exactly where he fits on the all-time list of boxing's best



Pernell Whitaker was regularly featured on the cover of The Ring during his peak years – from 1989 when he was the magazine's Fighter of the Year to his controversial showdown with Julio Cesar Chavez in 1993. He was No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings from 1993-1995.

Whitaker befuddled Chavez with his defensive prowess, but he also landed big punches.

lightweights is subject to debate, but what is not is the fact that it doesn't take long to reach his name.

Whitaker once precisely described his approach to boxing a few days before what many believe was his greatest moment, the night he bewitched Julio Cesar Chavez until the Mexican superstar was left disarmed, discombobulated and disconsolate as an arena filled with more than 60,000 Chavez supporters in San Antonio fell silent.

"You convince a guy he can't hit you, and the fight is over," Whitaker told me that night. "You're in control. The guy begins to get self-conscious. He's embarrassed to punch. Then you turn yourself loose and do what you want.

"The way to beat a macho guy is to embarrass him. My idea is to make a guy look stupid. It's very frustrating for a fighter to know he's right there and he can't hit me. It begins to break him down, because he misses and I make him pay. The man who makes mistakes pays dearly in the ring. My shots don't have to be hard, because the more I frustrate him, the more it takes away from his arsenal. Making a man miss is the art of the game."

Whitaker raised that art to genius on many nights, but never more than when he left a then-87-0 Chavez first mystified, then angry and finally broken. Chavez had been forced to retreat all night, missing time and again and then eating stinging right jabs. He was like a guy driven off a picnic blanket by a swarm of gnats.

The eeriest part of that evening was not the robbery-by-pencil performed by judges Mickey Vann and Franz Marti, who both called a clearly one-sided boxing lesson a draw (judge Jack Woodruff didn't do much better, finding for Whitaker 115-113 on a night where it was charity to give Chavez three rounds). The eerie part was how silent the Alamodome fell during the final round as Whitaker stood in front of Chavez, dipping and dodging, slipping and sliding, leading Chavez around as if on a leash as Whitaker's cornerman, Lou Duva, pounded the canvas, demanding he play it safe. What Duva didn't understand was that, in Whitaker's worldview, he was.

"They stole it from me, but I can accept that because he knows he got his ass beat," Whitaker would say that night. "I did him in."

Indeed he had, in the way he won so many times. The best way to describe the process is this: Here. Gone. There. Gone. Over here. Gone. Over there. Gone. HereGoneThereGone. Fight ... Gone.

Defensive mastery turned into offensive dominance is how Whitaker won world titles from lightweight to junior middleweight. It is why he was a first-ballot Hall of Famer. It was also why he was considered, along with Chavez, one of the two best pound-for-pound fighters of his era. They were opposites in every way, but when they squared off it was Whitaker who prevailed, regardless of what the record book says.

Whitaker died unexpectedly on July 14 in Virginia Beach at the age of 55 in a way you would never have predicted. He was hit by a car at a busy intersection as he was crossing the street after dark. For the man who couldn't be hit, such an ending hardly seemed possible. His funeral was held in Norfolk's Scope Arena, where he'd fought so many times in front of the people who knew him best. He packed the house one last time. He was the star who never left home.

"Pernell showed us that boxing could be an art as well as a sweet science," eight-division titleholder Manny Pacquiao tweeted out in tribute.

Winner of the lightweight gold medal at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, Whitaker turned pro with fellow Olympians Evander Holyfield, Mark Breland, Meldrick Taylor, Virgil Hill and Tyrell Biggs four months later on a nationally televised show called "Night of Gold." No one shined brighter than Whitaker.

He was like Picasso, an artist doing things in a way no one had before with a combination of remarkable agility, reflexes, vision, mental acuity under pressure and creativity that befuddled opponents and baffled fans not used to watching someone undress an opponent while standing right in front of him.

He was not so much a ballerina as a fistic breakdancer, contorting himself in unfathomable ways to avoid punches and then landing one from behind his back. His signature move was to dip into a low squat, like a catcher behind the plate, feet and arms spread wide, the rear of his trunks nearly touching the floor, eyes popping out of their sockets as he reacted to every move his opponent made before he made it, and walking away untouched. At his best, he was mesmerizing to watch.

"The obvious stuff was his footwork, distance control, his reflexes and timing, but he also had incredible mental toughness," recalled Carl Moretti, Whitaker's longtime matchmaker at Main Events. "Nobody believed in himself more than Pernell. He had the athletic ability to beat anyone. You could not hit him, and that would become embarrassing to opponents. He'd beat them in a way where they'd walk out of the ring physically OK but never wanting to do that again."

As Whitaker once put it, "I don't care if I'm fighting God. If I don't want God to hit me, He's not going to hit me."

This was borne out time and again, even in his first "loss." Journeying to France to challenge Jose Luis Ramirez for the WBC lightweight title, Whitaker was 15-0 and facing an opponent whose record was 100-6. No matter. Whitaker boxed Ramirez blind but apparently did the same to two of the judges. While one agreed with the general opinion and scored it a lopsided 117-113 for Whitaker, the other two had it 118-113 and 116-115 for Ramirez. The Ring Magazine would later call it the worst decision in the lightweight division in 10 years. The Ring was being kind.

Seventeen months later, Whitaker had by then won the IBF title and was defending it against Ramirez in a rematch in Norfolk. Led into the ring by the Norfolk State marching band, Whitaker whitewashed Ramirez, winning every round on two cards and nearly all on the third. His family sitting in the arena wore "No Way Jose" buttons. It was a message Ramirez should have heeded.

Whitaker would defend the lightweight title successfully eight times, including a win over Ghanaian great Azumah Nelson, before moving up to 140 and then 147 pounds. He dominated in both divisions, twice beating Hall of Famer Buddy McGirt. In addition to the Chavez robbery, he would go on to lose a controversial decision to Oscar De La Hoya that is still hotly debated more than 20 years later. But in the end, those two blemishes and a couple of late-career losses can't erase the memory of Pernell Whitaker's master showmanship.

Often he would slip a punch, dip low, step around his opponent and then tap him on the back. When he turned – BANG! Then he'd smile, a gold tooth gleaming in the lights.

Once he went so far as to pop Roger Mayweather with a punch, slip his return fire and then move behind him and pull his shorts down to his knees. Mayweather was not amused. The fans were.

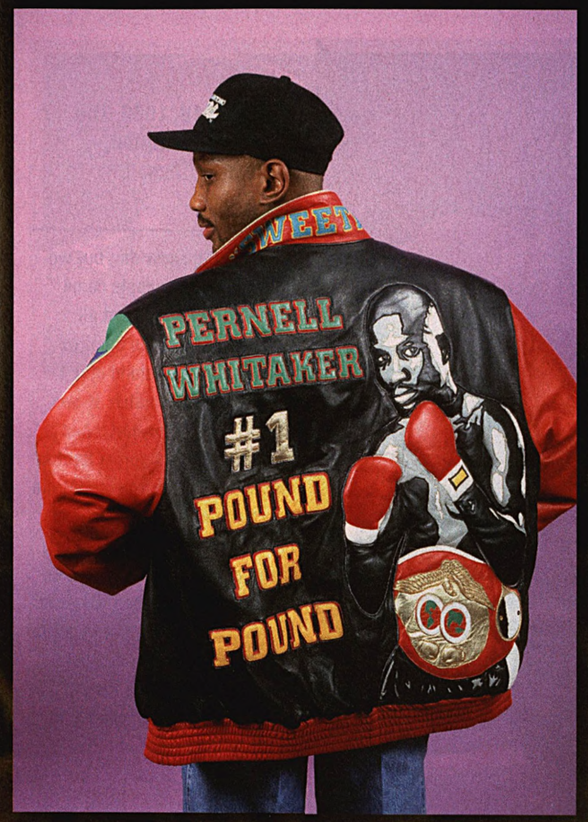
That was the sweet side of the Sweet Science to Sweet Pea Whitaker, a fighter who understood he was in the ring to entertain as well as win and to do both with a style that left his opponents wondering what the hell just happened.

"Everybody has the key to beating Pernell Whitaker, but it never fits the lock," he once said. "Whatever it takes to make it as easy a fight as possible, that's what I'm looking for."

Perhaps that's the most remarkable part of Pernell Whitaker's career. He made something so hard look oh so easy. RING

PERNELL WHITAKER: GREATEST HITS

HERE ARE JUST SIX OF THE MANY PERFORMANCES THAT MADE 'SWEET PEA' A LEGEND IN HIS OWN TIME



Whitaker earned his No. 1 spot in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings with several brilliant boxing performances against top opposition, and he took a lot of pride in that lofty status.

Pernell Whitaker was one of the most skillful boxers, not just of his generation but of all time. Regarded as one of the best defensive fighters ever, he had an otherworldly knack for making even fellow Hall of Famers look ordinary. "Sweet Pea" won six major world titles from lightweight to junior middleweight between 1989 and 1995, reigned as welterweight champion until 1997, and regularly sat atop the mythical pound-for-pound lists during that time (and in fact inspired The Ring to create a belt recognizing him as the P4P champion).

Whitaker was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1964 and began boxing at 9 years old. He won silver at the 1982 World Championships and upgraded to gold at the Olympics in 1984. He exited the amateur scene with an outstanding 201-14 record.

"It was the most successful time in my life, winning the Olympic gold medal," he said.

He turned professional in the fall of 1984. In early 1988, he challenged Jose Luis Ramirez for the WBC lightweight crown but lost a highly controversial split decision to the Mexican. Unperturbed, Whitaker bounced back, beating Greg Haugen for the IBF strap a year later. It was the start of one of the most distinguished lightweight reigns in history. Whitaker put on a virtuoso performance against Ramirez in a rematch, winning the Ring championship and WBC title, and then knocked out Juan Nazario to add the WBA belt and become the first undisputed lightweight champ since Roberto Duran.

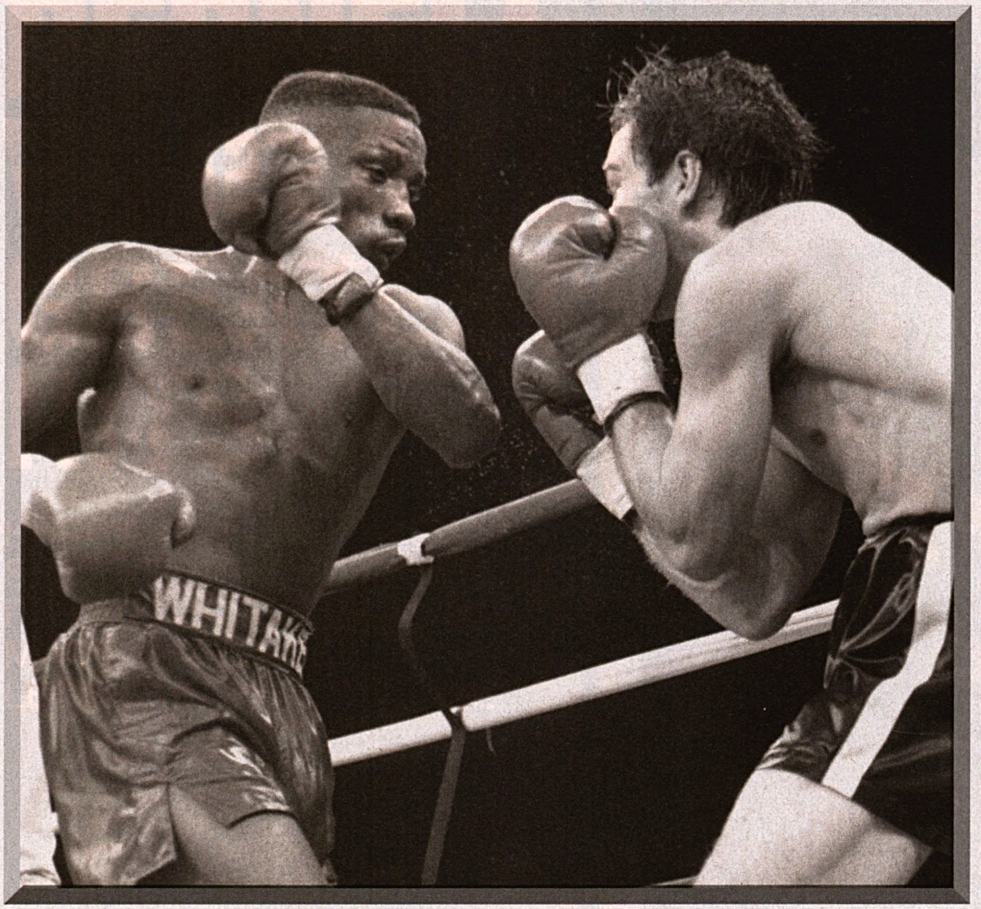
The southpaw wizard made a brief pit stop at junior welterweight, where he won the IBF title, before jumping to welterweight. At 147, he won the WBC belt and lineal champ status from Buddy McGirt.

Then, in September 1993, Whitaker met the legendary Julio Cesar Chavez, who entered the showdown with a mind-boggling 87-0 record. At the conclusion of 12 rounds, it looked like the American was a clear winner, but he had to settle for a baffling majority draw.

In the middle of his welterweight reign, Whitaker moved up to 154 pounds and bested the much bigger Julio Cesar Vasquez for the WBA title. He promptly dropped back to 147, where, in total, he would amass eight defenses before losing in controversial fashion to Oscar De La Hoya.

Although he continued to fight, Whitaker's appearances were less frequent, and he retired after a shoulder injury in 2001. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2007 with a record of 40-4-1 (17 knockouts).

Whitaker spoke to The Ring on July 2 about six of the victories that defined his remarkable career. Less than two weeks later, he was tragically struck by a car in his hometown and died at the age of 55. »

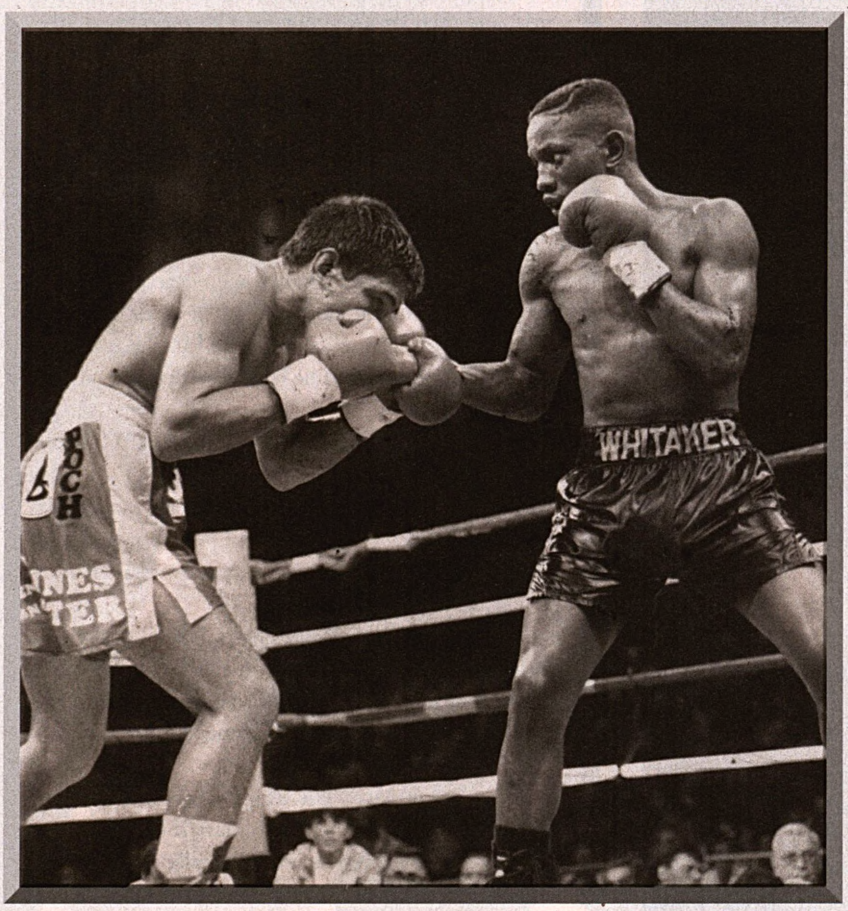


GREG HAUGEN

February 18, 1989, The Coliseum, Hampton, Virginia • Titles: IBF lightweight

"It was a big snow day, but we still had 10,000 people come out. It wasn't difficult at all (to put the Jose Luis Ramirez disappointment behind me). I knew I'd get a rematch. It was a great fight for myself. I had great trainers in Georgie Benton and Lou Duva. George taught me how to be a good professional. I took that advice and went in the ring and took my time, was patient and made the fight easy. He was pretty good, but I was at my best and the combinations were flowing out and the jab looking good. Just having a lot of fun in the ring."

RESULT: WHITAKER UD

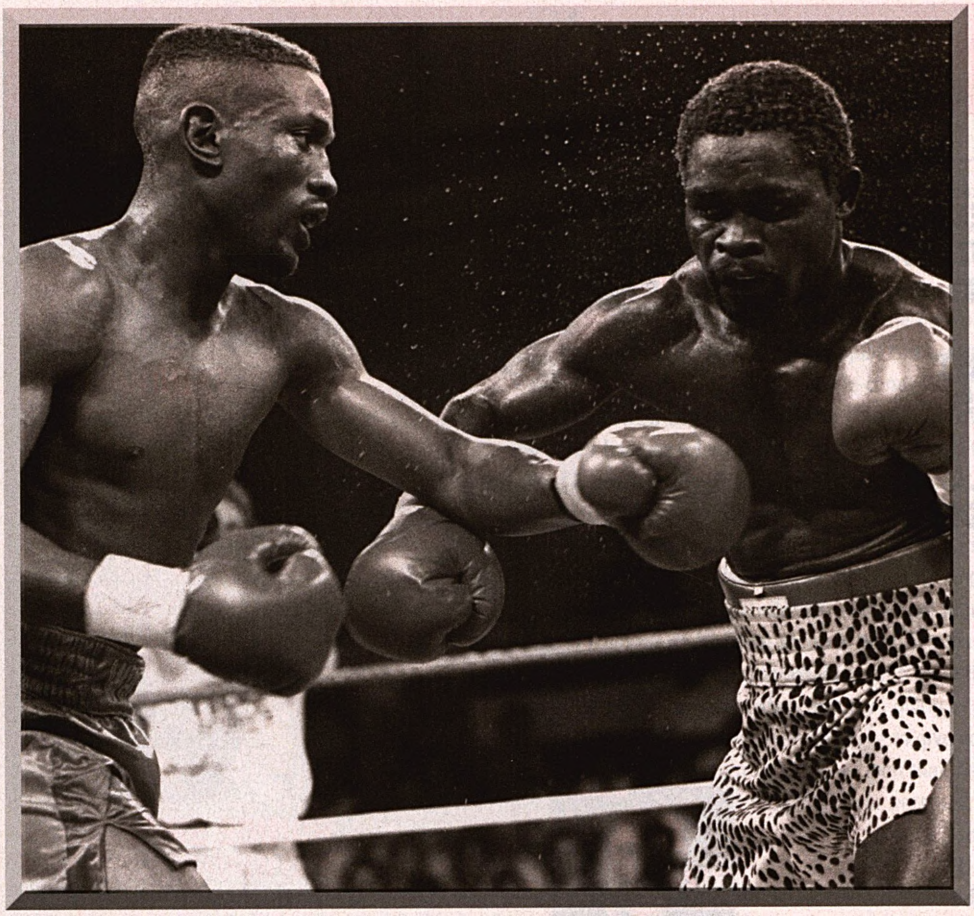


JOSE LUIS RAMIREZ

August 20, 1989, Scope Arena, Norfolk, Virginia • Titles: Ring/IBF/WBC lightweight

"I thought I easily won (the first fight), but I was in another country. I don't think I did anything wrong the first time. It's always good to get a rematch of a first fight you should have won. Ramirez was the champ. I don't know what he did well – I just countered what he did. He fought the way he thought he could win the fight, but I learned a lot from the first fight. So I just went out and did things a little different and made it look a little easier the second time around. I knew I was going to do a lot better than the first time; I knew I could make this fight a lot easier than the first time. I (think I won nine rounds in the first fight) and the rematch I won all of them. He didn't get a single round from me. I was a young kid. Winning a world title is always exciting; I was super excited for my family – my mom, really."

RESULT: WHITAKER UD

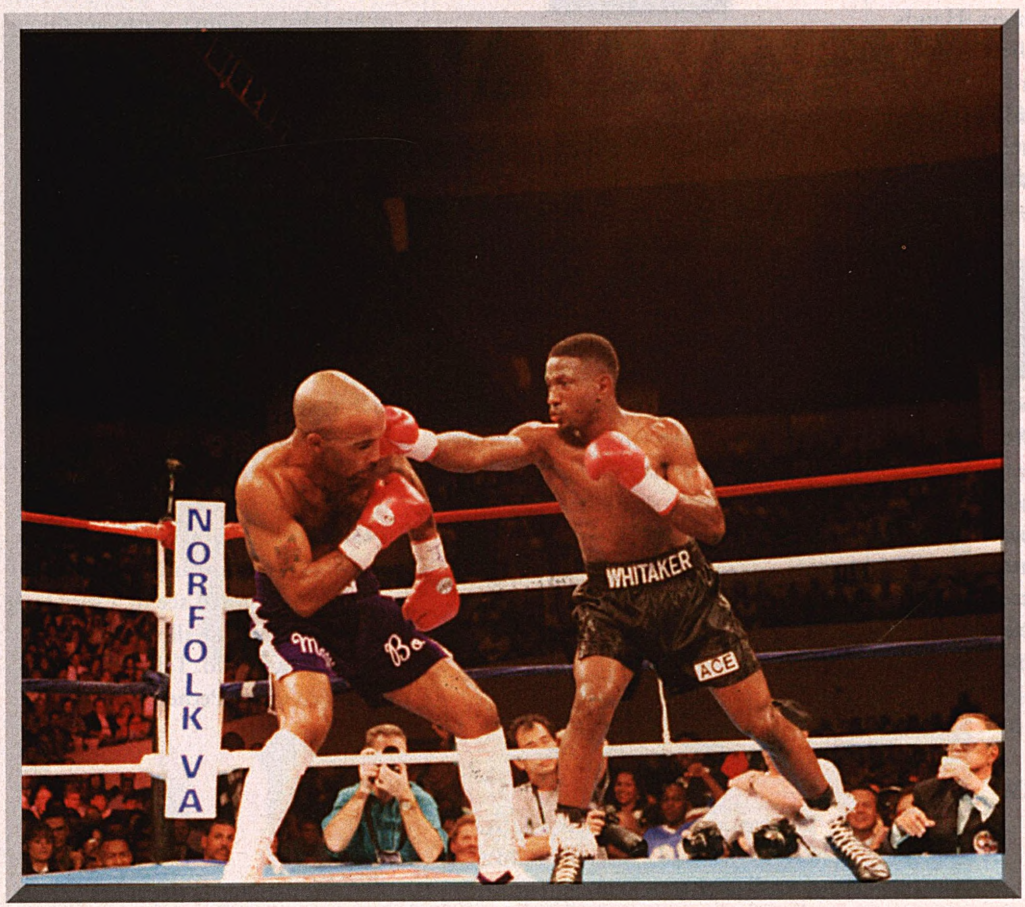


AZUMAH NELSON

May 19, 1990, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF/WBC lightweight

"At the press conferences, I try to be professional. I'm not your guy to try to go and tell a guy what I'm gonna do. I'm not gonna give away my strategy to anybody. I go to the press conference, say hi to everybody and wish my opponent good luck. I like Azumah Nelson. I think he's a great champion. He was a comer – he kept coming, never going back – and I'm good at hitting guys, and he had to go back. Everybody I faced was a great fighter, but fights are only as hard as you make them. I work hard, so when I put the work in, I'm looking forward to a (positive) result."

RESULT: WHITAKER UD



BUDDY MCGIRT

March 6, 1993, Madison Square Garden, New York • Titles: WBC welterweight

"I couldn't make 140 anymore; I stayed there long enough. So I moved up to 147. It's the mecca of sports – every man, woman or kid wants the opportunity to perform at the Garden. The first time, they said he hurt his shoulder, so I gave him a rematch. I didn't want no complaining about losing. Fool around with him, trick him – it was fun."

RESULT: WHITAKER UD

THOSE WHO KNEW HIM BEST

WHO BETTER TO DESCRIBE PERNELL WHITAKER THAN THE MEN WHO SHARED THE RING WITH HIM? SIX OF SWEET PEA'S OPPONENTS (AND ONE OF HIS TRAINERS) RECALL THEIR EXPERIENCES:

GREG HAUGEN

"He was the better man. I'm not afraid to say that. He was a great fighter, and he beat a lot better guys than me. I fought a lot of good fighters. Hands down, Pernell was the best by far. He was fast. He was hard to hit. He had great defense. He didn't square himself up. He was the smartest guy. He had fast hands and fast feet.

BUDDY MCGIRT

"Pernell didn't move much; he'd stand in front of you and turn you around. From that southpaw stance, he was phenomenal – he could turn you and slip; he could get under the shots and still be in the same place. His balance was great. He had it down to a T."

JORGE PAEZ

"Whitaker was a master of lateral movement; he moved everywhere. Very intelligent fighter. That's why he was champion in four weight divisions. He knew how to score and move and be defensive. Masterful in defensive skills. He knew how to move around the ring. He was only 5-foot-5 and could take on any guy and still make them look ridiculous."

OSCAR DE LA HOYA

"It would be a coin flip (as to who had the best defense) between Pernell Whitaker and Floyd Mayweather. Both had different styles. Whitaker used his waist more and stood in front of you and was very slippery. Mayweather was more of a boxer that moved just a little bit more. The most difficult to hit was probably Whitaker. He had to be one of the most skillful fighters of any generation – the fact he could stay right in front of you and could still slip the punches. Whitaker wasn't a runner; he was just someone who stood right in front of you and knew how to slip. Whitaker had it all."

JULIO CESAR CHAVEZ

"He was very elusive. He was just hard to find and especially hard to hit. He was very intelligent."

FELIX TRINIDAD

"When boxing experts discuss who the best defensive fighters are, the name of Pernell Whitaker is always in the conversation. We knew that he was very good defensively, so we came prepared for the fight."

RONNIE SHIELDS (TRAINED WHITAKER FROM THE MID-1990S ONWARD)

"I'd say he landed about 85 percent of his jabs; he didn't waste anything. He set everything up with his jab, then he played everything off his defense. With Pernell, if you're watching him, he might give you a feint, he might give you this and that, but he's always going to jab to make sure he's at the right distance when he's throwing combinations. The thing about Pernell was he used every aspect of his game for defense. Everything he did, he made a defensive move first to make you do something so he can create his offense – and that's why Pernell Whitaker was the best defensive guy I ever worked with. He had a great jab, his defense was probably the best you're going to see in a very long time, and he had all the technical skills in the world. Talent-wise, you just can't beat Pernell Whitaker."

JULIO CESAR CHAVEZ

September 10, 1993, Alamodome, San Antonio, Texas • Titles: WBC welterweight

"I gave up everything. I took the fight wherever they wanted; it doesn't matter where I perform at. I do the work, 6-8 weeks, go to wherever the venue is and be ready. With Chavez, we had a big crowd there, and I wanted to be number one, pound-for-pound – we can't both be walking around saying we're pound-for-pound the best fighter. Let's get in there and see who is the best. No rivalry, just two great fighters going in there, and we're going to see who the people choose as their pound-for-pound great fighter. It was built up pretty well; actually, I didn't do a lot. Everybody was looking forward to seeing the fight. I just stayed focused on what I had to do when I got in there. It wasn't just Mexican fans. It might have been the majority, but everybody showed up – celebrity people. The world was there, because everybody who couldn't get there (in person) watched it at home on TV and they got the same result. I always try to get off to a good start. Out of the first six rounds, I at least want to get four or five of them rounds, if I don't get them all. I didn't look to fight this man (to avenge Olympic teammate) Meldrick Taylor. Meldrick fought a good fight, just came up a little short. Me, personally, I knew it wasn't going to be that type of fight. I think I got at least nine of them rounds. I got to give something to Julio: He got at least three of those rounds. Other than that, he got nothing. I've seen him a few times – he's a friend, it's never personal."

RESULT: DRAW

JULIO CESAR VASQUEZ

March 4, 1995, Convention Center, Atlantic City, New Jersey • Titles: WBA junior middleweight

"I just went up (in weight) – it was available, so we took it. I didn't stay there. I just went up there and won the title and moved back down to 147. I just took a challenge; even if the guy won the fight, I would still have held onto the welterweight title. Actually, I think I weighed about 149, 150 at the weigh-in. I didn't have a problem at welterweight; I just moved up and took that fight and put it together and went out and won the title. Just that one fight."

RESULT: WHITAKER UD

The greatness of Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather Jr. were questionable during boxing's "cold war," but the Filipino icon has redeemed himself with his post-Mayweather body of work.

AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

REEVALUATING GREATNESS

MANNY PACQUIAO'S VICTORY OVER KEITH THURMAN PUSHED HIM FROM MY SHIT LIST TO MY 'ATG' LIST

By **Doug Fischer**

If you weren't sure if Manny Pacquiao was still a legitimate welterweight contender prior to his split-decision victory over Keith Thurman, your skepticism can be forgiven.

His recent track record going in to the FOX Pay-Per-View event was inconclusive.

However, if you weren't sure if Pacquiao was an all-time great prior to the July 20 showdown, you either dislike the Filipino hero or you're a seriously jaded bastard.

I like Manny a lot. It was an honor to cover his meteoric rise in the sport during the 2000s, but I withheld from describing him as a "great fighter" during most of the past decade, so just call me Mr. Jaded. I'll go into more detail on why, but first allow me to revisit the fight with Thurman, whom I picked to beat Pacquiao, and explain why I and others were riding with One Time (or, more accurately, were Team Skepticism).

As impressive as Pacquiao's victories over Lucas Matthysse and Adrien Broner were, given his age, if you closely observed his reflexes and hand speed without nostalgic fanboy goggles, you could see that the good senator was slowing down.

Most observers (me included) thought Pacquiao deserved the nod against Jeff Horn, who won a unanimous decision in July 2017, but the fact that he struggled at all against the unrated Australian underdog suggested that he was fading. Pacquiao bounced back with the Matthysse stoppage last July and was spry during his unanimous decision over Broner in January, but those victories could be dismissed as "mirages." Matthysse looked shot in his previous bout, while Broner was, well, Broner – a glorified gatekeeper, good for the pay-per-view promotion, not so hot once the bell rang.

Despite his own question marks thanks to injuries, inactivity and a shaky showing against Josesito Lopez in January, Thurman, an undefeated world titleholder in his prime, promised to test Pacquiao in ways his recent foes could not. The 30-year-old Floridian possessed athleticism and technique the strong-but-crude Horn lacked. Thurman was fast like Broner, hard-hitting like Matthysse, but he wouldn't be the stationary target the two recent Pacquiao victims were.

It looked like an even matchup on paper, and in a pleasant surprise, the welterweights' styles, smarts and experience clashed in a dramatic and entertaining 12-round bout in Las Vegas. »

Thurman's expression mirrors what most watchers were probably thinking after he got knocked down: "Did that really just happen?"

Thurman sought to immediately gauge Pacquiao's resilience and fighting spirit by taking it to the veteran in the opening minutes of the fight. Pacquiao answered Thurman's impetuousness (and all the skeptics watching worldwide) by dropping the younger man with a sweet two-piece before the end of Round 1.

For the next four rounds, Thurman (29-1, 22 KOs) had the bewildered look Pacquiao victims – including future Hall of Famers Miguel Cotto and Shane Mosley – had during his welterweight peak 8-10 years ago. Pacquiao (62-7-2, 39 KOs) didn't just shock Thurman with speed and power, he befuddled the beltholder with his boxing IQ.

But Keith is no dummy. He gradually acclimated to Pacquiao's perplexing style and worked his way back into the fight during the middle rounds. Thurman, who landed more punches than any other Pacquiao opponent in the 43 bouts tracked by CompuBox, took control of Rounds 7-9 and threatened to take over the bout down the stretch. However, Pacquiao landed a staggering, momentum-stealing body shot in Round 10 that sealed the deal for the superstar.

The fight was competitive, arguably close (although there's

TOP 10 OLDEST FIGHTERS TO WIN WORLD TITLES

By **Anson Wainwright**

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS ISN'T A LIST OF THE OLDEST CHAMPIONS IN HISTORY. IT'S A LIST OF THE OLDEST BOXERS TO *WIN* MAJOR WORLD TITLES. FOR EXAMPLE, ARCHIE MOORE, WHO WAS LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION INTO HIS 40S, ISN'T INCLUDED, AS HE WON THE TITLE AT 36.

1. BERNARD HOPKINS

(49 YEARS, 3 MONTHS AND 4 DAYS): light heavyweight - Extended his own record when he unified the IBF and WBA 175-pound titles by outpointing Beibut Shumenov in April 2014.

2. GEORGE FOREMAN

(45 YEARS, 9 MONTHS AND 26 DAYS): heavyweight - Trailing badly on the scorecards, Foreman landed a picture-perfect right hand to knock out the much younger Michael Moorer in November 1994.

3. SUGAR BOY MALINGA

(42 YEARS AND 8 DAYS): super middleweight - The ageless South African perennial super middleweight contender upset Robin Reid in December 1997 to regain the WBC title.

4. CORNELIUS BUNDRAGE

(41 YEARS, 5 MONTHS AND 16 DAYS): junior middleweight - The Detroit native unseated Carlos Molina to regain the IBF title in October 2014.

5. MANNY PACQUIAO

(40 YEARS, 7 MONTHS AND 3 DAYS): welterweight - The modern-day legend rolled back the years and added another name to his already impressive resume when he outboxed Keith Thurman in July 2019.

6. BOB FITZSIMMONS

(40 YEARS, 5 MONTHS AND 30 DAYS): light heavyweight - The former middleweight and heavyweight champion dropped down in weight to light heavyweight to become boxing's first three-weight world champ when he beat George Gardner in November 1903.

7. ANTONIO TARVER

(39 YEARS, 4 MONTHS AND 22 DAYS): light heavyweight - The former Ring light heavyweight champ regained the IBF 175-pound title by easily outpointing Clinton Woods in April 2008.

8. MUHAMMAD RACHMAN

(39 YEARS, 3 MONTHS AND 27 DAYS): strawweight - In the twilight of his career, the Indonesian veteran snapped a four-fight losing streak to knock out unbeaten WBA titleholder Kwanthai Sithmorseng in Thailand in April 2011.

9. GIACOBBE FRAGOMENI

(39 YEARS, 2 MONTHS AND 11 DAYS): cruiserweight - The former amateur standout turned professional late and won the vacant WBC title against Rudolf Kraj in October 2008.

10. JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ

(38 YEARS, 10 MONTHS AND 4 DAYS): junior welterweight - Marquez won the WBO's interim belt against Serhiy Fedchenko in April 2012 and was upgraded to full status in late June after Tim Bradley vacated the title.

no way Pacquiao should have had to sweat through a split-decision announcement), but the right man won the fight. Pacquiao, the busier of the two, dug deep to put on the best performance by a 40-year-old veteran that I've seen since Bernard Hopkins leapfrogged the super middleweight division to school light heavyweight champ Antonio Tarver over 12 rounds in 2006.

Pacquiao wasn't as dominant as Hopkins was against Tarver, but the newly crowned WBA titleholder was way more entertaining.

So, how was it that I, a self-described amateur boxing historian, didn't consider this once-in-a-lifetime talent an all-time great?

Don't get me wrong. I know Pacquiao's credentials – highlighted by world-title recognition in eight weight classes, flyweight to junior middleweight – are amazing.

Is he the most accomplished Asian fighter ever? Yes. Among the best boxers of his generation? No doubt about it. A first-ballot future hall of famer? Of course!

Pacquiao didn't just remind us of his skills against Thurman; he showed some of his old killer instinct as well.

But an all-time great? I had a hard time with that.

I thought he was well on his way with what he did in the 2000s, but

STEVE MARCUS

boxing's "cold war" between Golden Boy Promotions (which represented Floyd Mayweather Jr.) and Top Rank (which promoted Pacquiao) kicked into full gear at the start of the 2010s, and nothing epitomized that bullshit more than what I once dubbed "The Neverending Story" – the on-and-off-and-on-again Mayweather-Pacquiao negotiations and speculation.

So, by the time then-Ring Magazine editor Michael Rosenthal asked me to compile my list of the 20 greatest boxers of all time to go along with the lists of 19 other "knowledgeable boxing historians and writers" in a feature article that ran in the October 2014 issue previewing the Mayweather-Marcos Maidana rematch, both Floyd and Manny were on my shit list.

The SuperFight had yet to happen, and their frustrating dance around each other for the past four years (as well as the boxing world's side-taking, co-signing and fascination) had made me sick to my stomach. There was plenty of blame to go around – including the promoters (who refused to work together), the networks (HBO and Showtime, which wouldn't allow their contract fighter to cross the street), and the fans (who supported Mayweather's and Pacquiao's pay-per-view fights against lesser opponents) – but I placed most of it on the fighters.

Long story short, neither Mayweather nor Pacquiao behaved the way great fighters are supposed to. I knew they were in the discussion to make my top 20 (in part because the list was not to include what the International Boxing Hall of Fame then defined as "Old-Timers" – boxers who had their last pro bout before 1943 – so they didn't have to contend with the Sam Langfords, Harry Grebs and Jimmy Wildes of folklore, but also because of their obvious talent and stellar resumes). However, when I painstakingly made my list, the only boxers of this generation that had undeniably great accomplishments and that throwback mentality were Evander Holyfield and Hopkins, and they landed at Nos. 19 and 20.

Pacquiao and Mayweather? Screw 'em, I thought. They put business before the sport. They played it "safe." The man who graces this month's cover is a powerful reminder of what a truly great fighter is supposed to do when the business gets in the way of the sport and that fighter's legacy – rise above it and MAKE the right fights happen.

Networks and politics threatened to bar Pernell Whitaker's 1993 showdown with Julio Cesar Chavez. Like Mayweather and Pacquiao in 2010-2011, Whitaker and Chavez were the consensus top two pound-for-pound boxers in the world. Whitaker wanted that mythical title all for himself and he wanted to prove he was the man while Chavez was still undefeated with the best record in boxing (87-0, 75 KOs).

He conceded the edge in money (Chavez was guaranteed to make more), location (the fight would be in San Antonio, Texas, where Chavez had a legion of loyal fans) and promotion (Don King, Chavez's promoter, would take the lead over Main Events, which represented Whitaker); and he also took the risk of pissing off HBO (and losing his contract with the subscription network) by agreeing to face the Mexican superstar on Showtime's pay-per-view arm. We all know what happened once the bell rang, but what was important for the sport and the fighters was that the bout took place when it was supposed to.

Great fights – from Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier I to Sugar Ray Leonard vs. Thomas Hearns I – have a shelf life. It's not the same matchup if it is held off until one of the fighters begins to fade or loses a fight.

Whitaker and Chavez made my top 20, at Nos. 11 and 12, just behind Billy Conn and Leonard, and right ahead of Ike Williams and Emile Griffith.

Where did I rank Pacquiao and Mayweather? I don't know. Somewhere outside of my top 20, toward the front of a group of 40 "honorable mentions."

By the time Mayweather-Pacquiao finally took place and Mayweather won the money grab I cynically called the "Billion Dollar Sparring Session," I figured the American defensive genius could move ahead of Pacquiao in my personal all-time rankings, but both were still outside of my top 20.

However, looking back, Pacquiao has had an excellent run post-Mayweather, including decisions over then-Ring-rated welterweights Tim Bradley, a potential future Hall of Famer, and Jessie Vargas.

Following the Pacquiao fight, Mayweather faced unrated Andre Berto in the final pay-per-view bout of his Showtime contract, almost to spite the fans, and then took on Conor McGregor in the MMA star's pro boxing debut.

The last time Mayweather stepped into a boxing ring, he faced a 20-year-old junior featherweight kickboxer in Japan who I refuse to name because it wasn't a real prizefight.

Let that sink in.

That's who Mayweather fought at age 40. Pacquiao fought Thurman. You tell me who's the real fighter – the great fighter.

So, where does Pacquiao rank all time? I don't know. But he belongs with the legends that made my top 20, maybe even the top 10.

Consider this: The Boxing Writers Association of America named Pacquiao the Fighter of the Decade for the 2000s. With Thurman added to his ledger, he's arguably put together a strong enough resume from 2010-2019 to once again merit Fighter of the Decade consideration.

How many boxers have been worthy of back-to-back Fighter of the Decade honors? Ray Robinson (for the 1940s and 1950s)? Ali (for the 1960s and 1970s)?

Pacquiao's in great company.

Read Dougie's piece on his 2014 Top 20 all-time greats at bit.ly/2K5DaFs.

ROCKY

50 YEARS AFTER LEGENDARY CHAMPION ROCKY MARCIANO WAS TRAGICALLY KILLED IN A PLANE CRASH, WE TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT THE UNDEFEATED BUT ILL-FATED GREAT'S TITLE REIGN

By **Tom Gray**

Rocky Marciano proudly displays the Ring Magazine heavyweight championship belt presented to him one month after he knocked out Jersey Joe Walcott in Philadelphia. The presentation was made at a Boxing Writers Association luncheon on Oct. 31 in New York City.

AL BELLO

Man walks on the moon. Woodstock festival draws 350,000 music fans. Charles Manson arraigned in Sharon Tate murders. More than 250,000 march on Washington in protest of the Vietnam War. Just some of the unforgettable events in American history that took place in the year 1969. It was this headline, however, that shook the world of boxing to its very foundations: "Marciano Dies in Plane Crash."

On August 31, 1969, the day before his 46th birthday, former heavyweight champion of the world Rocky Marciano boarded a small Cessna 172 aircraft in Chicago to

meet a business engagement in Des Moines, Iowa. The pilot, Glenn Belz, who had very little experience and lacked the necessary qualifications to fly by instruments, encountered difficult conditions and lost control of the plane. Marciano, Belz and another man, Frankie Farrell, died on impact near Newton airfield.

Half a century has passed since his tragic and untimely death, but Marciano's amazing legacy continues to endure, and his 49-0 (43 knockouts) mark has taken on an almost mystical quality.

His championship reign lasted three years, which is much shorter than many of his contemporaries. However, Marciano's title bouts contained enough drama and excitement to satisfy even the most demanding of fight fans. He got off the floor to win, he came from behind to win and he scored knockouts when on the verge of being stopped himself. Out of seven Marciano title bouts, three were named The Ring Magazine Fight of the Year. It's not all about longevity when you're at the top; it's about what you do when you're there. That's why Marciano's career is timeless.

Would he have been a great fighter in 2019? It's worth remembering that at 5-foot-10½ and barely 190 pounds, Marciano was a small man compared to today's modern cruiserweights, never mind the behemoths who rule the glamour division at approximately 6-foot-6 and 250 pounds. The main objective for a champion is to be the best in their time, and Marciano accomplished that feat during a golden era when there was only one championship to win.

Growing up as a kid in his beloved home city of Brockton, Massachusetts, he'd harbored hopes of becoming a major league baseball player, but it was Marciano's destiny to score home runs in the prize ring. By the time he was set to challenge the great Jersey Joe Walcott for the heavyweight championship, Rocky was unbeaten in 42 fights with 37 knockouts. As his record suggests, he was an authentic knockout puncher, but there was so much more to his game. He bobbed and weaved, cut off the ring adeptly, set up power punches with subtle feints, used angles and targeted the body with murder in his heart. Marciano's boxing brain was vastly underrated, as was his ability to adjust under fire – a vital championship quality. Take all of this and mix in the stamina of a workhorse and the courage of a soldier, and you had Rocky Marciano.

The Ring now looks back at all seven of the great former champion's heavyweight title fights:

JERSEY JOE WALCOTT

September 23, 1952/Municipal Stadium, Philadelphia • The Ring Magazine Fight of the Year

At 38 years old, Arnold Raymond Cream, aka Jersey Joe Walcott, was the oldest heavyweight champion in boxing history, a record he would hold until a 45-year-old George Foreman knocked out Michael Moorer in 1994. However, as was the case with so many great fighters, age was just a number. Despite entering the ring as underdog – the first heavyweight champion to do so since Jim Braddock faced Joe Louis in 1937 – Walcott wasn't going to go away easily. He decked the unbeaten challenger with a crisp left hook in Round 1 and boxed brilliantly in one of the greatest heavyweight fights ever. Round after round, Walcott's jab, foot speed and famed herky-jerky defense gave Marciano fits. In the 11th, the old champion hurt his man with another stiff left hook and the quick follow-up barrage left Marciano visibly exhausted as he returned to his corner. The 12th was another big frame for Jersey Joe. Scoring was on a rounds basis and Walcott was ahead 8-4, 7-5 and 7-4-1 going into the 13th round. Marciano needed a knockout to win, and he got it with one of the most explosive right-hand shots ever landed in a heavyweight championship fight. A short left hook – released while the stricken veteran was on his knees – compounded the damage and Walcott was counted out. He never knew what hit him. "I thought I was just a hair behind (in the scoring) and I knew I had to do something," said Marciano following his historic triumph.

RESULT: KO 13

JERSEY JOE WALCOTT 2

May 15, 1953/Chicago Stadium, Chicago

The battle-worn Walcott was nine months older and Marciano – now entering his prime years – was nine months better. The new champion started the rematch where he left off, attacking his opponent with massive power shots and depriving him of the time and distance he required. Some of these assaults were wild and sailed harmlessly through the night air, but the challenger appeared flustered by Marciano's aggression and was unable to pull the trigger on counter shots like he had in Philadelphia. With less than a minute remaining in Round 1, a left hook landed high on the head, and as Walcott ducked down to avoid the anticipated overhand right, he was met with a jolting right uppercut to the point of the chin. He didn't see it. He didn't expect it. He could not recover from it. Referee Frank Sikora completed the count a fraction before Walcott quickly pulled himself erect. It was all over at 2:25 of Round 1. An official appeal was launched by Walcott's manager, Felix Bocchicchio, who complained that his fighter had been the victim of a quick count, but the result stood. This was the final fight of Walcott's 23-year professional career. He retired with a modest record of 50-20-1 (31 KOs), but the official numbers belie the class and quality of a truly great fighter.

RESULT: KO 1

ROLAND LASTARZA 2

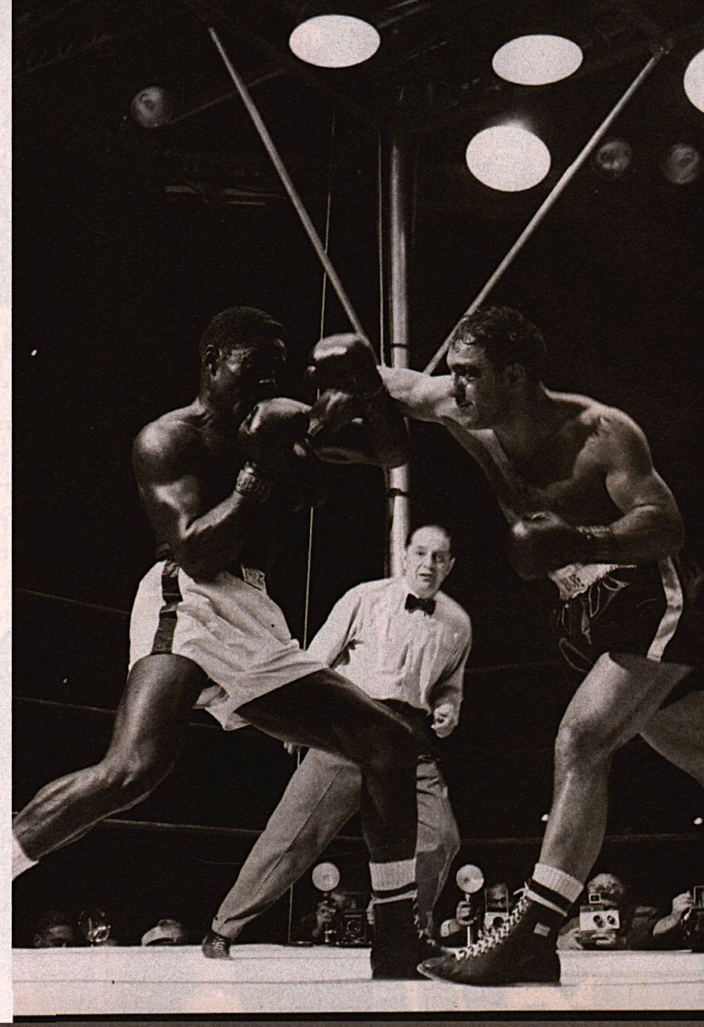
September 24, 1953/Polo Grounds, New York • The Ring Magazine Fight of the Year

Approximately 45,000 fans showed up for this eagerly anticipated rematch. The pair had met three-and-a-half years earlier at Madison Square Garden, with Marciano claiming a 10-round split decision, but despite the fact that many felt the verdict should have been unanimous, the LaStarza camp was extremely confident ahead of the return. "Roland is at his physical peak," manager Jimmy De Angelo told The Ring. "He is two inches taller and many inches broader than he was in 1950. LaStarza's left hand will beat Marciano when next they meet, as it actually beat Rocky in 1950." But while the 26-year-old challenger from the Bronx exhibited some nice lateral movement and sharpshooting early, his success was short-lived. The champion opened a cut over his opponent's right eye in the third and was in complete command by the midway point. He rolled under LaStarza's assaults and hammered the body at every opportunity. He also let loose with headbutts, elbows and shots after the bell, and referee Ruby Goldstein penalized Marciano in the sixth round for low blows. The punishment and the pain continued to intensify until LaStarza ran out of resistance in the 11th. Marciano missed a left hook but got full leverage on the follow-up right, and a brutal assault put LaStarza through the ropes. The challenger rose gamely, but Marciano unloaded his entire repertoire, forcing Goldstein to intervene.

RESULT: TKO 11

EZZARD CHARLES

June 17, 1954/Yankee Stadium, New York

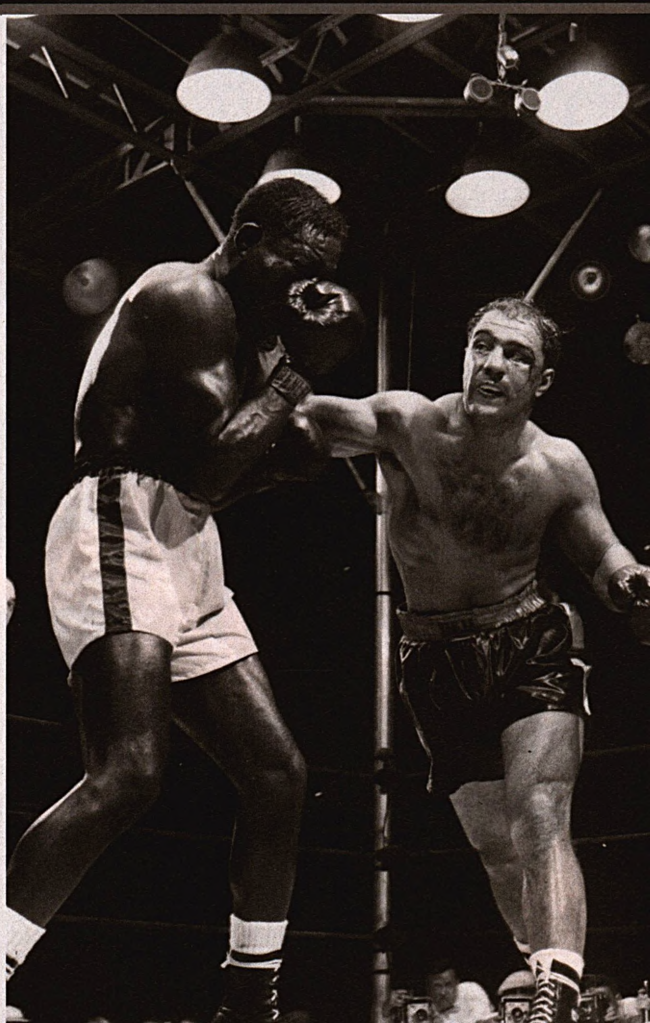


It is hard to overstate the quality of Ezzard Charles. Unanimously considered one of the greatest fighters who has ever lived, "The Cincinnati Cobra" was a surefire Hall of Famer before his heavyweight incursion even began; two victories over perennially avoided middleweight Charlie Burley and three over light heavyweight legend Archie Moore guaranteed that. In June 1949, Charles outpointed Walcott to win the heavyweight championship and repeated that result two years later before losing twice to Jersey Joe. With Marciano now at the helm, Charles attempted to become the first man to regain the greatest prize in sports, and that motivation brought out the best in him. An 18-5 underdog, Charles fought brilliantly, using all the experience he'd gained in amassing an incredible 85-10-1 (49 KOs) record. Unlike many of Marciano's previous opponents, Charles knew how to neutralize the champion's work on the inside, and he gave him hell early on. The challenger worked the body, scored with highlight-reel power shots and kept his man off-balance by staying mobile. However, Marciano was impossible to discourage, and over the course of his first and only completed 15-round bout, he wore his man down. This was as close as any fighter would come to dethroning Marciano, who won a unanimous decision by scores of 9-5-1, 8-6-1 and 8-5-2.

RESULT: UD 15

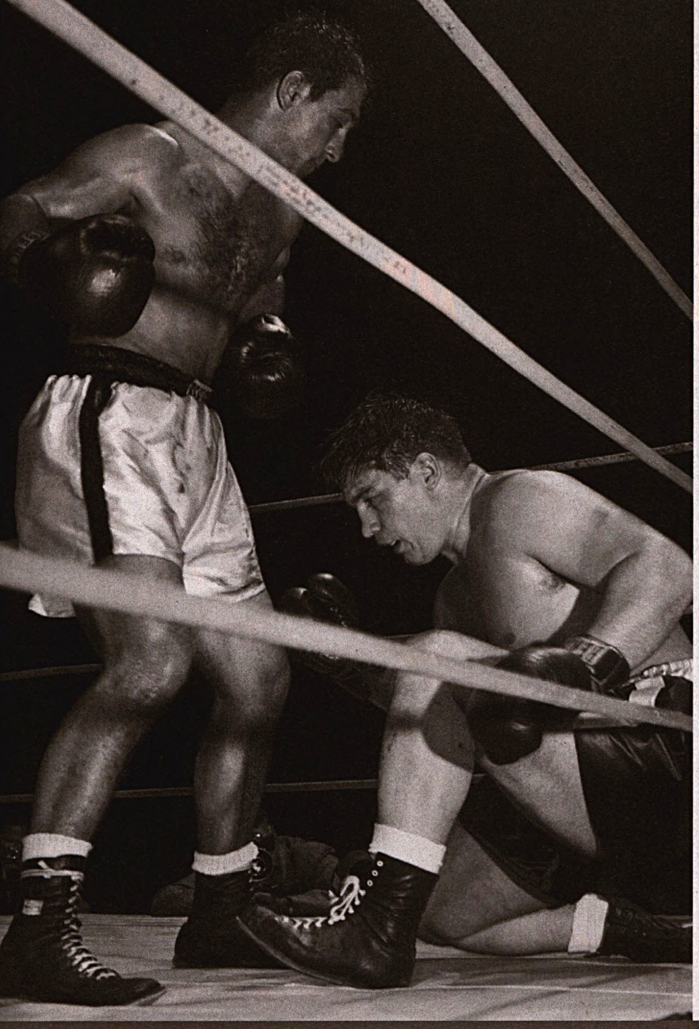
EZZARD CHARLES 2

September 17, 1954/Yankee Stadium, New York • The Ring Magazine Fight of the Year



As his return bouts with Walcott and LaStarza proved, Marciano always performed better in rematches. This sequel was no different. The champion was obsessed with proving his superiority over Charles by inflicting a painful and destructive victory, and he didn't disappoint. Perhaps with the aim of matching Marciano for strength, the challenger weighed in at a career-heaviest 192.5 pounds – seven pounds heavier than for the first meeting – but the extra bulk worked against him. After clearly winning the first round, Charles cracked Marciano with a huge right in the second, but that success only served to infuriate the champion, who attacked ferociously and dropped his rival with a two-fisted barrage. Unlike the first meeting, when Charles was given time to work on the outside and slow Marciano down with clinches, he was now being overwhelmed by volume, strength and aggression. The only rest he could take advantage of was between rounds, and it wasn't enough. Marciano walked through Charles' assaults with abandon and dished out fierce punishment to head and body. A clean right decked the challenger in the eighth, and he rose on unsteady legs. The inevitable finish came courtesy of a torrid combination, culminating in a left hook that dropped Charles to his knees. Worn out and battered, the great ex-champion was unable to beat the count. Despite his dominance, Marciano had actually needed the stoppage due to a grotesque cut that had opened up on his left nostril.

RESULT: KO 8



DON COCKELL

May 16, 1955/Kezar Stadium, San Francisco

Following two brutal bouts with Charles, Marciano was entitled to a gimme. Enter British and Commonwealth titleholder Don Cockell. The 205-pounder from London, England, was 16 pounds heavier than the formidable champion, but he was portly, and 18,000 fans at the Kezar Stadium expected a massacre. "Cockell looks like a tub, but he's got a mean look and he's real alert – don't get careless," said Marciano while reviewing the fight film and recalling his thoughts. "The Rock" didn't perform at his best but came to himself in the sixth when – with what became a signature move – he feinted the right and uncorked a huge left hook to the jaw. In the eighth, Marciano went after Cockell savagely, and a powerful right draped the Englishman over the middle rope for the first knockdown. The end was near. Another Marciano right floored Cockell early in the ninth, and the challenger was also tagged by a bonus right uppercut as he sat in the corner awaiting the count. All heart and no fuel, Cockell rose only to be floored again by a sustained burst of power shots. When Cockell got up this time, referee Frankie Brown stayed close, and a huge right and equally devastating left prompted his intervention. "I didn't expect such a strong man in there," Marciano admitted after the fight. "He was very strong in the first two rounds and a very durable fighter. I thought I hit him with plenty of my best punches."

RESULT: TKO 9

ARCHIE MOORE

September 21, 1955/Yankee Stadium, New York

A crowd of 61,574 turned up for what would be the final chapter. Marciano was a 4-1 favorite to defeat the 39-year-old Moore, who was looking to make history by becoming the first reigning light heavyweight champion to win the heavyweight title. Coming in, "The Old Mongoose" was arguably the most experienced active fighter alive, with an astonishing 149-19-8 (108 KOs) record. In Round 2, Moore, a cerebral ring general, timed Marciano overreaching and floored him with a right hand that was felt but not seen. "The Rock" returned the favor with interest in the sixth, however, flooring the challenger with a bone-crunching right of his own. Moore found his feet, and Marciano put together one of the most violent and prolonged assaults of the era. Defensively brilliant, Moore rode out the majority of these shots, but the ones that landed were doing damage. The light heavyweight king finally elected to fire back and paid the price when Marciano decked him again. Incredibly, Moore fought well in the seventh, but the champ was merely biding his time. He dropped Moore with a big right in the eighth and closed the show with a double left hook in Round 9. This was the last big battle. "I would like to announce my retirement from boxing at this time," said Marciano at a news conference in April 1956. "I never really got hurt in the ring, and I feel perfect physically, and probably had two or three good fights left."

RESULT: KO 9

THE MUSIC CITY TRAILBLAZER

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER **CALEB PLANT** HAS PUT NASHVILLE ON THE BOXING MAP WHILE OVERCOMING SOME ROUGH TIMES ALONG THE WAY

By **Michael Montero**

The list of professional fighters from Nashville, Tennessee, is a short one. Prior to 2019, the most successful boxer from the area was probably former bantamweight Jerome "Kid" Coffee. He fought more than 200 times as an amateur, winning several national tournaments, yet lost in his only professional world title challenge to Australia's Jeff Fenech in 1985. Fast forward more than three decades and Caleb "Sweet Hands" Plant became Nashville's first major titleholder, outpointing Jose Uzcategui to claim the IBF 168-pound belt on January 13 at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles. When asked if he felt proud to represent his hometown, Plant made

STEVE MARCUS

it clear.

"Absolutely," he told The Ring. "I'm a trailblazer."

Plant comes from humble beginnings. He was born and raised in Ashland City, a small rural town about 20 miles northwest of Nashville with a population of around 5,000. When his parents, Richie and Beth, returned home from the hospital days after Caleb was born, they couldn't afford a crib, so they used a dresser drawer. The Plant family was surrounded by poverty; trouble seemed to lurk around every corner. Richie, a kickboxer, started a modest martial arts gym and introduced his son to combat sports when he was 9 years old. The gym became a sanctuary for young Caleb. By his teens, he was competing in boxing and kickboxing while many of his friends were turning to drugs and alcohol. "That's why my dad started that gym in the first place," he said. "To keep me from running around with my buddies." Although the family barely had enough money to keep the power on, somehow Richie always found a way to raise the money to cover training and traveling costs.

Following in his father's footsteps, Caleb excelled at kickboxing first. As a teenager, he won nine national championships and five world championships, oftentimes beating grown men. He became the first 16-year-old to win the International Kickboxing Federation national title. A year later, he became the first 17-year-old to win an adult world title as a member of the American national team. While having major success in kickboxing, he was competing in boxing as well. Father and son would go from a boxing tournament one weekend to a kickboxing tournament a week or so later. The schedule was a lot to handle for a young man, and ultimately Plant felt that he had to choose between the two sports.

"It got to a point in my amateur kickboxing career that I had really accomplished everything I could," he said. "Winning adult world titles before I was even an adult. From that point, I focused solely on boxing. The money and the recognition that comes with it played a part, of course, but I always enjoyed boxing more. Floyd Mayweather, Muhammad Ali, Roy Jones – those were the fighters I admired as a kid, and they were all boxers."

Trained by his father, Plant compiled a record of 97-20 in the amateurs. He would go on to win the 2011 national Golden Gloves title, join Team USA and become an alternate for the 2012 London Olympic Games. The following year, he competed in the World Series of Boxing as a member of the USA Knockouts team. Injuries kept him on the sidelines for the most part, but Caleb dominated the one fight he had against Argentina's Tomas Andres Reynoso.

It was around this time that Justin Gamber came on as his head trainer. Gamber had been in Las Vegas training (current unified heavyweight titleholder) Andy Ruiz Jr. and could barely keep him in the gym. "I remember in one particular stretch, out of 19 scheduled workouts Andy showed up for four of them," he told The Ring. Frustrated with the way things were going in Vegas, Gamber decided to move back to Nashville and open his own gym. There was only one fighter he wanted to work with. "The only name on my mind was Caleb Plant," he said. "I met Caleb back when he was young, and I knew what he was capable of. He had a ton of speed and athleticism, great reflexes, but what he lacked was strong boxing fundamentals. He had some bad habits from his kickboxing days; he was winning fights on pure athleticism. My job was to solidify those boxing fundamentals in his game."

Plant outclassed and quickly overwhelmed Mike Lee in the first defense of his IBF super middleweight title.

A new head coach wasn't the only big change in Caleb's life. In May 2013, his girlfriend, Carman Jean Briscoe-Lee, gave birth to a daughter who they named Alia. Just days after she was born, the couple learned that she was very sick. Alia had an unknown brain abnormality that caused seizures, sometimes hundreds a day, and was constantly in the hospital. "She had no motor skills; she couldn't hold her head up," Plant said. "She couldn't eat or swallow." On the rare occasions that she was at home, Alia slept while hooked up to a heart monitor and oxygen. A feeding tube was inserted into her stomach. Countless tests were performed at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital in Nashville, one of the highest-rated children's hospitals in America, but her condition remained a mystery to doctors. "Everything came back negative," Plant said. "To this day she does not have an official diagnosis."

The medical bills were stacking up. Carman had to quit working in order to take care of Alia's special needs, which was an around-the-clock job. It was time for Caleb to turn pro. Yet while many promoters had courted him in years prior, suddenly things went quiet. "There were a few promoters that were really excited about me and we had several conversations," he said. "But after Alia was born with disabilities, and the financial issues that it came with, people stopped returning phone calls." It was a sobering experience for Plant, who ultimately signed with Al Haymon and what would become Premier Boxing Champions. "Those were the people that believed in me from the very beginning, even after everyone else thought I wasn't going to be successful because of the situation with my daughter. I'm extremely happy with how everything has gone (with PBC) so far."

Caleb's professional debut was the opening bout of the Stiverne-Arreola 2 card at the USC Galen Center in Los Angeles on May 10, 2014. He would fight five times that year, winning four by knockout, all while he and Carman did everything they could to make Alia's life better. Many times during camp, Plant would sleep at the hospital. He would wake up in his daughter's room and head out to the boxing gym, return to the hospital, then off for strength and conditioning training, back to Alia, then out for a run, then try to sleep by her side through the night, only to be awakened every few hours by doctors coming in to run tests. The chaotic training schedule didn't bother him at all, because Caleb was in full control. What agonized him was watching his daughter struggle while having no control. Multiple times, he and Carman watched Alia go on life support, and somehow she always pulled through. But that would all change on the morning of January 29, 2015.

Alia was once again on life support, but this time things felt different. When Plant arrived at the hospital, he found her in the intensive care unit, where she lay motionless in an induced coma. "She was on life support all night, and by the morning her vitals were worse," he said. "The doctors told us she was going to pass away." That's when Caleb and Carman made a difficult decision. They let their daughter know that they were proud of her and they loved her. They instructed doctors to take her off life support and remove all the tubes that had been attached to her for most of her life. Soon after, precious Alia Jean

Plant and Fox Sports commentator Jordan Hardy, who works PBC broadcasts, have become one of boxing's most successful couples.

Plant died in her mother's arms at only 21 months old. The emotional strain took a toll on the couple's relationship; they would split up later that year.

The best thing for a fighter to do when dealing with personal tragedy is to get busy in the ring, and that's just what Plant did. He fought six times in 2015, winning four by knockout. During the weigh-in for his first bout of 2016 at Club Nokia in downtown Los Angeles, he met Jordan Hardy, an intern with PBC who shot and edited video for their social media. Hardy, who ultimately became a reporter for Fox Sports' PBC shows, earned a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism while running track and field for the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. The two quickly hit it off. "I introduced myself at the weigh-in and we talked a little bit," Plant said. "I was lucky enough to take her on a date, and it was a wrap. I knew if I could get her to go out with me just once, it would be over." The two began dating soon after, and their relationship grew as Sweet Hands climbed up the ratings. Many women are anxious about seeing their men fight, but not Jordan. "Watching Caleb fight is one of my favorite things to do," she told The Ring. "I never work his fights (for PBC) and I never will, so they don't interfere with my job."

Team Plant relocated to the Las Vegas area and continued winning over the next two years, eventually beating Rogelio "Porky" Medina in an eliminator bout to earn the No. 2 position with the IBF. Uzcategui was rated No. 1, with James DeGale holding the title at that time. A final eliminator against Rocky Fielding was scheduled for the summer of 2018, but a broken left hand that Caleb suffered in camp put those plans on hold. However, when DeGale vacated his title and Uzcategui was elevated to champion, the Fielding bout was scrapped and the IBF mandated an Uzcategui-Plant fight. Although he was undefeated heading into his first world title challenge, many doubted Plant had what it took to get the job done – something he was quite used to. "I think a lot of people doubt me for a lot of reasons," he said. "Not just because of where I'm from." Which brings us to the elephant in the room: race.

In an age where the majority of white fighters come from Europe, Plant is an anomaly. Not only is he rare due to currently being a highly accomplished American-born white boxer, he does it with a stereotypically black "slick" style. Caleb noticed he was treated differently back in his amateur days, something he says put a chip on his shoulder. "There were tournaments I went to where people expected me to not do well," he said. "I'm trying to eliminate that stereotype of what somebody can or cannot be just because of the color of their skin. And not just for Caucasians, but for all ethnicities. I don't think it's fair for people to say what others can or can't do simply because of their ethnicity or religion; that's not how the world works. If you want to tell me that I can't do something because of the color of my skin or where I come from, that's OK, because I'm about to show you that I can."

Plant would go on to drop Uzcategui twice before taking the Venezuela native's title, proving himself as an elite-level fighter. "He was a tough guy that came forward and brought pressure like I thought he would," Caleb said. "In the fourth round, we cracked heads and I caught a bad cut over my right eye. I dropped him for a second time after the headbutt. That just shows my ability to focus and deal with adversity." It was a breakthrough performance in

an entertaining bout, yet it would not be the highlight of the night. Later on, Caleb met Jordan in the dressing room, dropped to one knee and proposed to her, and she said yes. "I already had my plans made that I was going to win the world title and then right after I was going to ask her to marry me," he said. "There was never a thought in my head of win, lose or draw." Jordan was taken completely by surprise. "It was the best day of my life by far," she said. "I have no clue how I didn't find out, but everyone on the team did a good job keeping it a secret. I said yes and I can't wait to marry him later this year. He's my best friend and I will always have his back."

As wonderful as the events of January 13, 2019, were for Caleb and Jordan, the celebration would be short-lived. His mother, Beth, died on the morning of March 9 as the result of an officer-involved shooting back in Tennessee. According to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, a deputy responded to a 911 call from an ambulance driver who was transporting Beth to a hospital. When she brandished a knife, the deputy fired on her. It was a devastating situation that Caleb doesn't like to speak about. "I found out the day that Jordan and I started to move into our new house," he said. "I got a call from a family member telling me what happened. That's a call nobody wants to get."

Once again faced with personal tragedy, Plant looked forward to getting back in the ring. The reason was simple. "If you look back at these difficult, real-life events that I've gone through, I had no control over those things. In the boxing ring, I'm in control; I get to say what happens."

Plant's first defense was a stoppage of Mike Lee (21-0, 11 KOs), whom he dropped three times in three one-sided rounds, on July 20. The fight was broadcast on Fox as a lead-in to the Manny Pacquiao-Keith Thurman pay-per-view. It was a massive opportunity, but Caleb laughed at the notion of feeling any pressure on the biggest stage of his career. "Pressure? What pressure?" he scoffed. "How about dealing with the pressure of seeing your daughter on life support? Having no resources, yet still becoming a world champion. Or coming from a place that's not the Midwest, not L.A., not New York, where other champions have already paved the way for you, but coming from a place where I'm the very first to be at this level. Where you can't make too many mistakes, otherwise that's it for you. When you come from nothing, you can't make mistakes. Pressure for me is a sanctuary compared to others."

Now that he's past Lee, Sweet Hands has big plans for the future. "My goal is to be the first super middleweight to hold all of the belts simultaneously," Plant said. "I'll be at 168 for a long time. I've always been one to stay in the gym. I'm a professional; this is all I do." Jordan is an admitted gym rat who works out with her fiancé every day. She beams with confidence when asked about his future.

"Caleb was born for this, and it's all he does. I feel really lucky to be with someone who is so committed and passionate about the sport. The boxing world better get used to him, because he's going to be on top for a long time." RING

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast "The Neutral Corner" can be heard on iTunes, iHeartRadio, Spotify and elsewhere.

Plant was the underdog against Jose Uzcategui. Unrated by The Ring prior to that fight, he is now ranked No. 3.

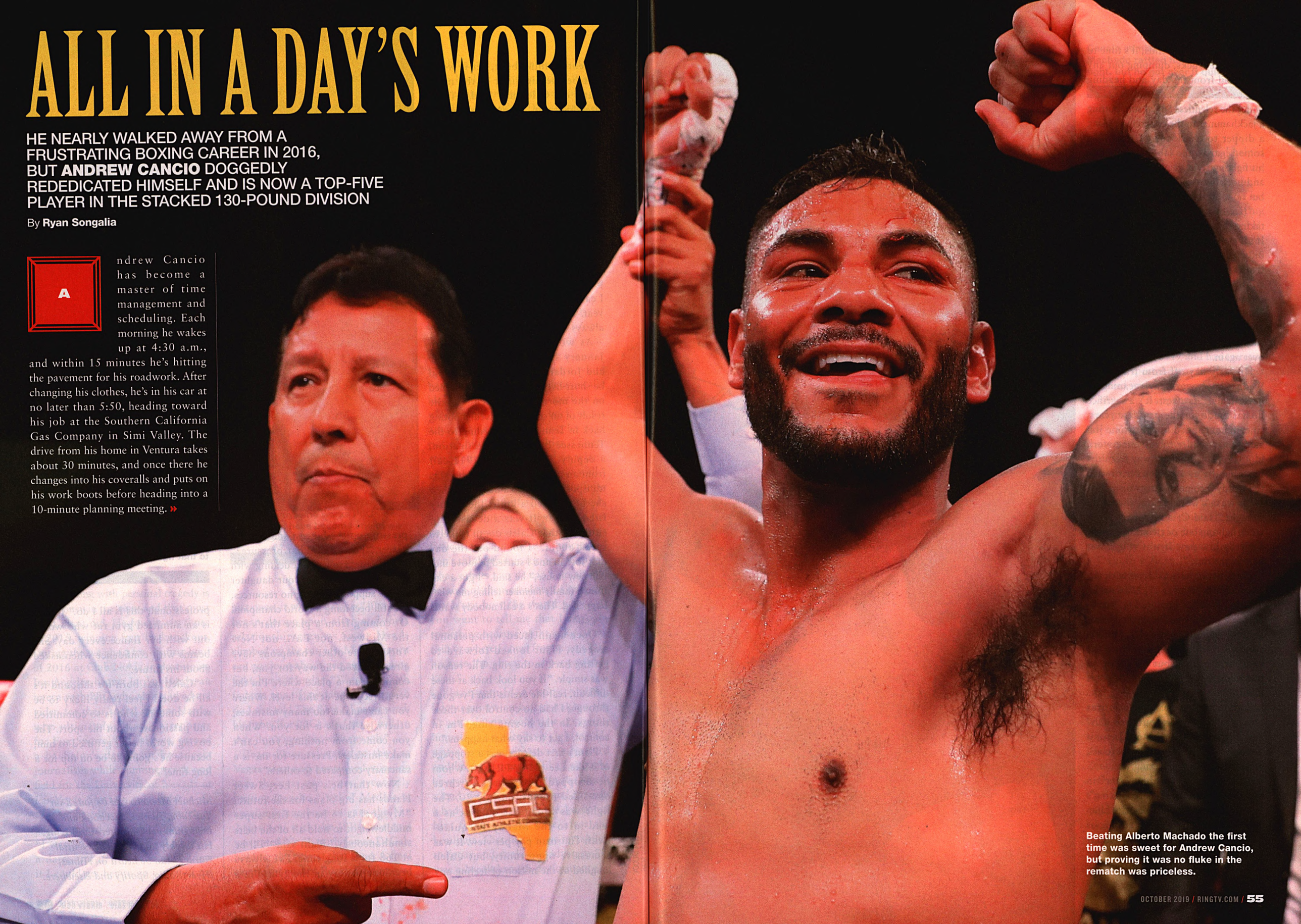
JOHN MCCOY

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

HE NEARLY WALKED AWAY FROM A FRUSTRATING BOXING CAREER IN 2016, BUT ANDREW CANCIO DOGGEDLY REDEDICATED HIMSELF AND IS NOW A TOP-FIVE PLAYER IN THE STACKED 130-POUND DIVISION

By **Ryan Songalia**

Andrew Cancio has become a master of time management and scheduling. Each morning he wakes up at 4:30 a.m., and within 15 minutes he's hitting the pavement for his roadwork. After changing his clothes, he's in his car at no later than 5:50, heading toward his job at the Southern California Gas Company in Simi Valley. The drive from his home in Ventura takes about 30 minutes, and once there he changes into his coveralls and puts on his work boots before heading into a 10-minute planning meeting. »



Beating Alberto Machado the first time was sweet for Andrew Cancio, but proving it was no fluke in the rematch was priceless.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

After the meeting ends, it's time to prepare the trucks, dumping out any excess oil from the day and heading out on the road. From there, he's under the relentless SoCal sun, putting a jackhammer to the concrete or using a dipper to check for gas leaks. In some regards, the labor isn't unlike his fighting style: grinding, methodical and not always pretty. It's dangerous, but no more so than his other job.

"(In boxing) we're guaranteed taking shots to the head," said Cancio. If all goes well, he's back at base by 2:30 p.m., and after cleaning the trucks, he clocks out at 3 p.m. and is on the road to Ventura to work out at the gym with trainer Joseph "Hoss" Janik for the next two-and-a-half hours. Then it's back home to eat, shower and sleep. Then do it all over again.

His only day off from training is Wednesday, a work day, meaning he never truly gets a rest. It's a sacrifice he has made for the past few years, since he expanded his part-time job as a meter reader to full-time work in 2015, transitioning away from the unstable life as a pro boxer toward the steady income of a regular job.

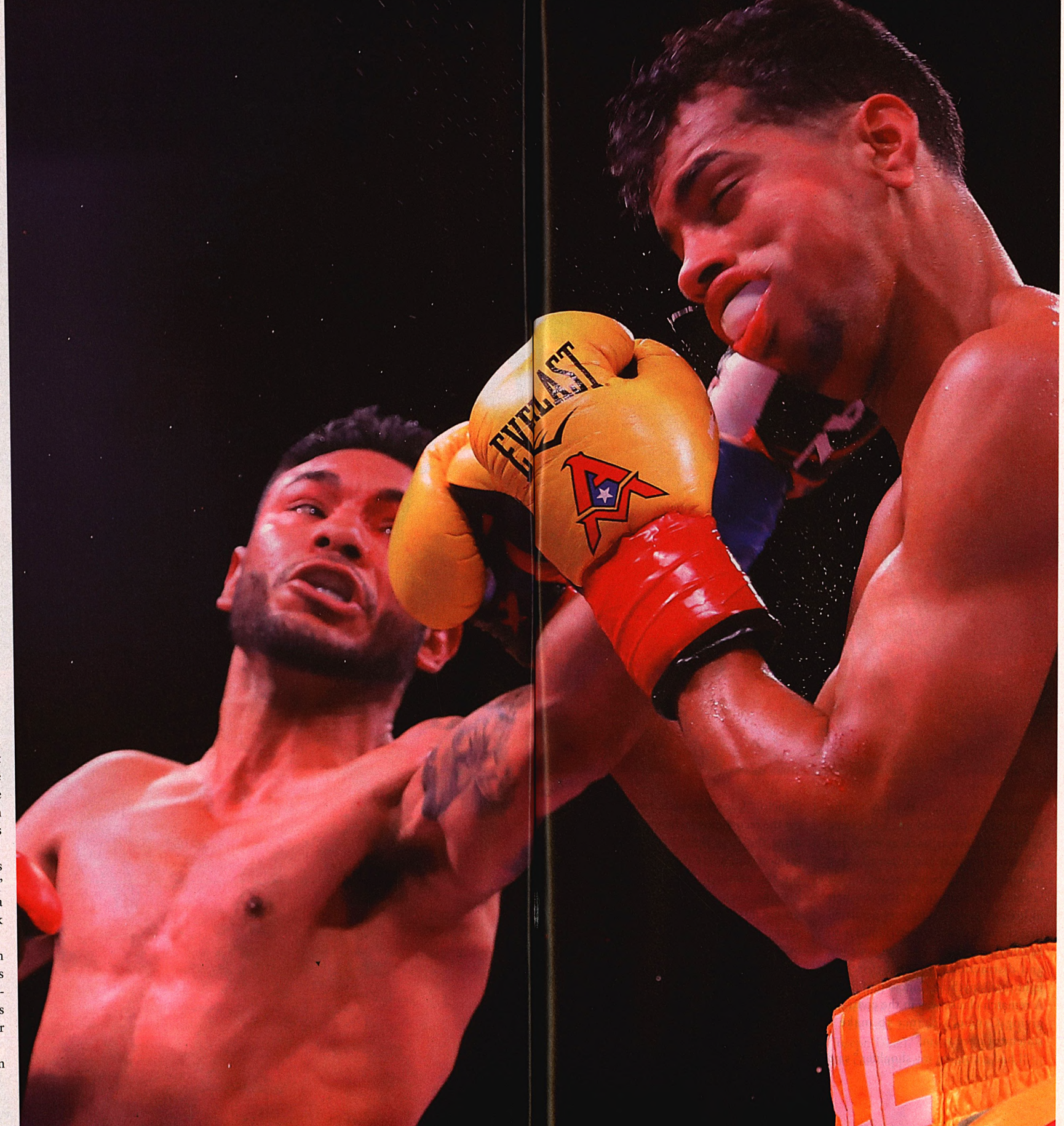
"It wasn't working out the way I thought," said Cancio. "It wouldn't work fighting one or two times a year for very low pay. It was rough out here at the time."

He believed he was done with the sport after September 17, 2016, when a cut on his nose obscured his vision during a ninth-round stoppage defeat at the hands of Joseph Diaz Jr. He stopped training and watching the sport and instead put his focus on providing the best life he could for his family.

For almost two years, Cancio was away from the sport, but "the itch" began to return when his children – a son and a daughter – continued to ask when he'd return to boxing.

Their desire to see their father in the ring once more led to boxing's latest Cinderella Man story, the blue-collar working stiff moonlighting as holder of the WBA "regular" junior lightweight title.

First, Cancio had to find a team



Cancio admits that the hype around Machado rattled him before the first fight, but he got over it quickly.

to bring him back. Janik had helped him with strength and conditioning in the past, but Cancio brought the popular trainer on board as his full-fledged chief second. Getting a manager would prove pivotal. Cancio approached Ray Chaparro, a local restaurateur whom Cancio often consulted for advice. Chaparro previously managed Daniel Franco, a featherweight prospect Cancio used to spar with frequently. Chaparro knew the kind of fighter Cancio was, but after his only fighter suffered a serious brain injury in 2017 and had to retire from the sport, he was hesitant to get involved with another one.

"Andrew happened to be (in my restaurant) one morning and said, 'Hey, I'm thinking of coming out of retirement. You don't have a fighter and you always told me you only work with one fighter at a time,'" recalls Chaparro.

"I've always believed that he could be a world champion. He's got a fan-favorite style, he's got a great personality – he has what it takes."

Cancio's first fight back was no gimme: He faced unbeaten Kazakhstani prospect Aidar Sharibayev in April 2018. Sharibayev thought it was a good idea to trade punches until he realized it wasn't. By then it was too late; Cancio scored two knockdowns before the Sharibayev corner threw in the towel early in the 10th round. The win earned Cancio a second go-around with Golden Boy Promotions, who signed him and promptly placed him back in a main event against Dardan Zenunaj, whom he beat by decision.

Despite his comeback success, Cancio was still considered a gatekeeper. He had wins over fighters like Rene Alvarado and Hugo Cazares, but usually fell short when he stepped up against guys like Diaz or Ronny Rios, making him the

ALEX MENENDEZ

The rematch left no doubt that Cancio had Machado's number.

perfect fighter to be an opponent to the stars. To change the narrative for the second half of his career, he'd have to change his mindset.

"I went in there like I had to prove myself," said Cancio. "For some reason, it just wasn't clicking. I was falling just short. The difference is the coaching – how they brought back the combinations, more head movement. I just needed to make the minor adjustments."

He brought that new approach with him when he faced Alberto Machado, a slender boxer-puncher who fights out of the southpaw stance. Machado was unbeaten, trained by Freddie Roach and viewed by many as the new standard-bearer of Puerto Rican boxing. Golden Boy matchmaker Robert Diaz admits he had no inkling that Cancio would do much more than give it his all in an entertaining bout.

"Did I expect him to win? No, I didn't expect him to win. That's the honest truth," said Diaz. "But I expected him to be in the fight. Why I made the fight with Cancio and Machado originally is that Machado had a voluntary defense. Cancio was ranked No. 10. Obviously he always brings a great crowd, always brings a good fight. I knew it would be an entertaining fight, regardless of the outcome."

Even Cancio admits he had read the headlines and wasn't sure what to expect once the bell rang.

"I was curious in the first round, kind of a little timid or scared, because a lot of people did hype him up as being the next superstar and saying he hit hard," said Cancio.

Ninety seconds into the fight, Cancio had his curiosity quenched when a three-punch combination floored him for a nine count. But the knockdown seemed to awaken him, and he pressed forward with a high-volume attack that culminated in three knockdowns and a fight-ending body shot in the fourth round.

With the victory came some of the trappings of success: His hometown, Blythe, on the California-Arizona border, gave Cancio the key to the city. But life continued much the same as before. He was back at work the following Tuesday and received a few pats on the back before resuming his labor. Still, despite having the belt in his possession, whispers persisted that the win was more attributable to Machado's struggles to make weight and distractions he had before the fight than anything Cancio had done. A rematch clause was in the contract, giving Cancio a chance to make a statement once again.

"I had a chip on my shoulder," said Cancio. "I don't feel like people gave me the recognition to be the champion after the first fight because of the fashion, the way I did it." To prepare for the rematch, Cancio cashed in his vacation time to focus solely on his mission. The result was only slightly different: A left hook to the body felled Machado for the count, this time a round earlier in the third. There would be no excuses this time, nothing to detract from the impact of his victory.

"Sometimes in boxing it's not always talent that wins, because as far as a fighter – and I don't mean this disrespectfully to Cancio – I think Machado has more to his game," said Roberto Diaz. "However, Cancio has determination, has heart and has fucking balls. Sometimes that overrides the talent."

The two wins over Machado earned Cancio more than he had made in all of his previous fights combined. He has considered giving up his day job because of how tiring it is to do both, but that isn't feasible just yet. Not for the life he's hoping to provide for his family.

"I still don't own my own house yet. The only thing that's changed is that I have money in the savings account, and I'm living a little bit more comfortable knowing that it's there," said Cancio.

If he can hold onto the belt and continue his winning streak, he'll get closer to his goals. Robert Diaz says Cancio gave him one name in particular that he had wanted in his comeback.

"He told me, 'I want to fight JoJo (Joseph Diaz).' I said, 'The only way that can happen is if you win a world title.' He's getting stitched up in the back room (after the rematch) and said, 'Remember your promise.' I said, 'What's that?' He said, 'You promised me JoJo.' Now I have to deliver."

That will have to wait. Rene Alvarado, the fighter Cancio stopped in eight rounds back in 2015, was ordered as a mandatory challenger for Cancio. Diaz says the fight will happen in September or October, and that Alvarado declined to accept a step-aside fee, saying he wanted to reach the levels that his twin brother, IBF junior flyweight titleholder Felix Alvarado, had reached.

"Rene told me, 'Look, Robert, my dream is to not only fight for the world title, but win it. I'm gonna win the world title. After that, I'll fight JoJo.' I gotta respect that," said Diaz.

Cancio knows the caliber of fighter Alvarado is, but doesn't foresee a result different from the first time they met.

"He throws a lot of punches and he hits hard," said Cancio. "He comes forward. He's always in great shape. It was a tough fight, and this next one will be a tough one as well, but I'll be ready for it."

Chaparro believes the Diaz fight is one that would be better for later down the line, on a bigger Cinco de Mayo card, and that it would be better to face some of the other titleholders, like Miguel Berchelt (WBC) or Tevin Farmer (IBF).

Those are phone calls for other people to make. Cancio is still beating the sunrise with his pre-dawn runs, cleaning off the trucks and checking the ground to make sure there are no dangerous gas leaks. Sacrifices are made, but he's getting closer to achieving his American Dream.

"Whatever big fights that are out there, I want them," said Cancio. "I'm here to make money for my family. Not only that, I'm here to make a name for myself." RING

A FRIEND OF JOHN L.

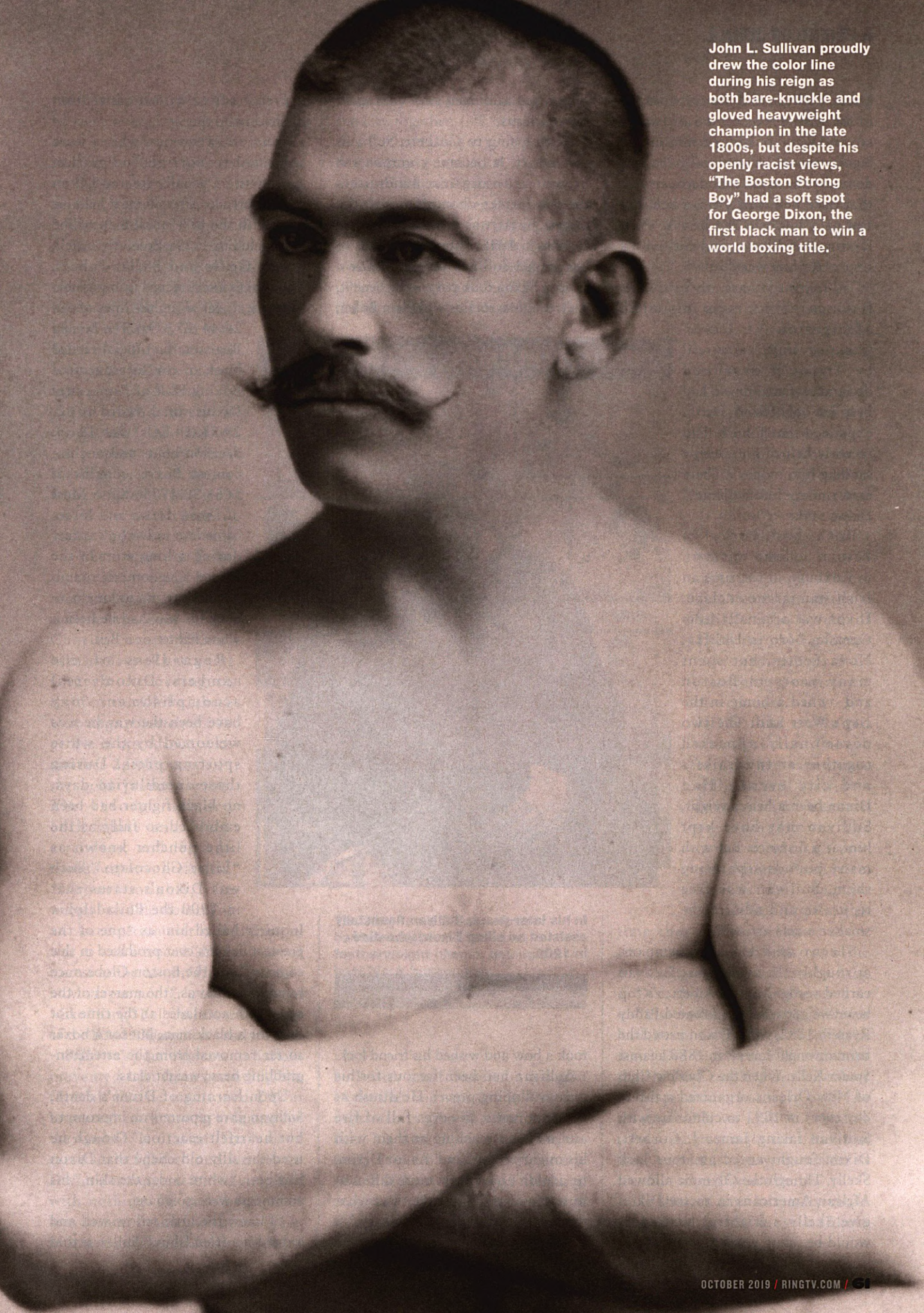
AN UNLIKELY BOND BETWEEN TWO CHAMPIONS GAVE EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICA A RARE GLIMPSE OF RACIAL HARMONY

By **Don Stradley**

John L. Sullivan was in Buffalo when he got the news. He was in his dressing room at The Garden Theater, preparing for one of the many stage gigs he'd taken on since retiring from the ring. It was early January 1908, and Sullivan's schedule that week included a turn as guest sports editor at the Buffalo Times, a public sparring session and a few speaking engagements. When he heard the news, though, the old brawler had to sit and collect his thoughts. A man he admired, George Dixon, had died.

Dixon, a former champion at bantam and featherweight, had admitted himself to Bellevue Hospital's alcoholic ward just two days earlier. Penniless and friendless, Dixon lasted only until the next night. He was 37. "That's sad news, indeed, to me," Sullivan said.

Sullivan's fondness for Dixon was perhaps the most curious thing in The Boston Strong Boy's long and turbulent



John L. Sullivan proudly drew the color line during his reign as both bare-knuckle and gloved heavyweight champion in the late 1800s, but despite his openly racist views, "The Boston Strong Boy" had a soft spot for George Dixon, the first black man to win a world boxing title.

career. Sullivan had always worn his racist attitudes as a kind of badge; anyone who confronted him on his bigotry would be summarily shouted down by the same thunderous voice that once bellowed, "I can lick any son of a bitch in the house." Yet, Dixon was black, and Sullivan's respect for him was deep.

To anyone aware of Sullivan's feelings about race, his open admiration of Dixon was puzzling, as would be Dixon's deathbed declaration that Sullivan had been his only friend. Dixon explained that John L. had recently helped him out by sending him money. "There aren't many like Sullivan," Dixon said.

Both had roots in Boston. Sullivan was born in Roxbury, at the time an Irish immigrant enclave. Dixon was originally from Canada, born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, but spent many years in Boston and owned a home in the city's West End. The two occasionally appeared together at fundraisers and city events. Had Dixon been a heavyweight, Sullivan may have kept him at a distance. But with many pounds separating them, Sullivan was free to praise and admire the smaller man's artistry.

The two were dominant champions at roughly the same time. Sullivan earned recognition as America's top heavyweight when he defeated Paddy Ryan in 1882, while Dixon netted the bantamweight laurels in 1888 against Spider Kelly. When the Olympic Club of New Orleans organized a three-day event in 1892 to culminate with Sullivan facing James J. Corbett, Dixon fought noted amateur Jack Skelly. Though the Olympic allowed African Americans in to see Dixon give Skelly a frightful beating, it would be many years before another integrated audience saw boxing in New Orleans.

After losing to Corbett, Sullivan was adrift. It became common for promoters to organize fundraisers for the former champion, and the biggest, by far, was at Madison Square Garden in 1895. Though he might've begrudged Sullivan his well-known racism, Dixon took part in the benefit, sparred a few rounds with Sam Bolen, took a bow and wished his friend luck.

In his later years, Sullivan financially assisted an ailing Dixon, who died in 1908.

Sullivan had been famous for his pure walloping power. He'd rush at his opponents, his eyes full of fire and malice, smashing at them with his mighty right hand. As for Dixon, he couldn't have been more different in terms of ring style. He was what the purists used to call "classy," a true master of the sweet science. He is even credited with the invention of shadowboxing.

In an era when non-whites were subjected to horrible indignities, sportswriters usually treated Dixon with reverence. After all, he'd held his own with the best small men of the day, including Frank Erne, Abe Attell, Young Griffo and Pedlar Palmer. Though his exact record is impossible to verify, it was along the lines of 50-26-44 (27 KOs). The Boxing Register, the official record book of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, cites Dixon's final record as 62-29-51 (34 KOs) with 12 no-decision bouts and one no-contest; Boxrec.com lists it as 68-30-57 (36 KOs). Most of those draws and losses came late in Dixon's career during a long stint in the United Kingdom; there's no telling how many might've gone his way had he been a white fighter or a Brit.

Regardless of the numbers, Dixon's real accomplishment may have been the way he was welcomed by the white sporting press. During those antediluvian days, no black fighter had been embraced so fully as the lithe puncher known as "Little Chocolate." Such was Dixon's status that in 1900 the Philadelphia Inquirer hailed him as "one of the greatest fighters ever produced in this country," and the Boston Globe once referred to him as "the marvel of the age," rare accolades at the time not only for a black man, but for a boxer so far removed from the attention-grabbing heavyweight class.

Upon learning of Dixon's death, Sullivan gave reporters an impromptu but heartfelt reaction. Though he used the silly old cliché that Dixon had been "white under the skin," his comments were poignant.

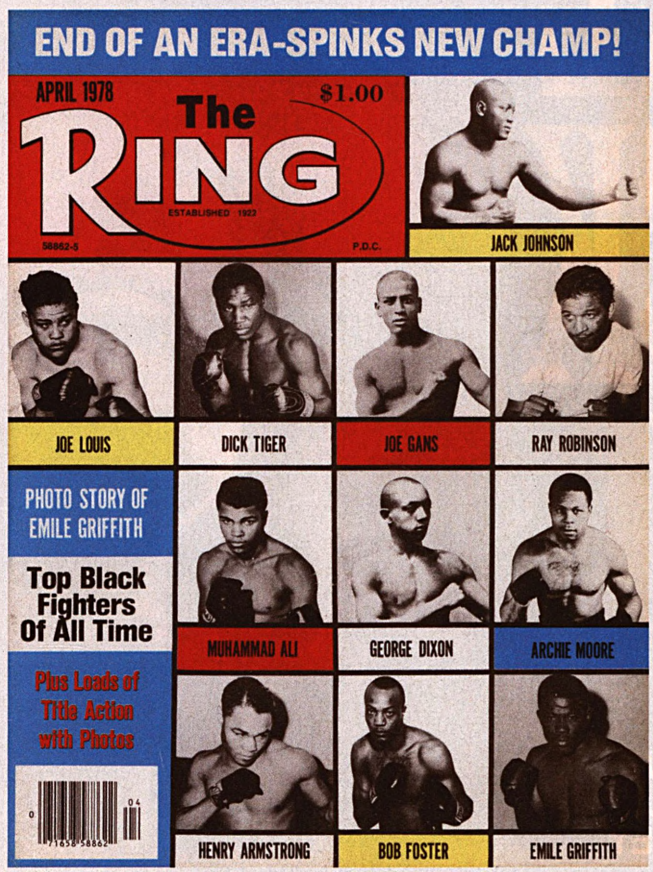
"I knew the little fellow well and valued his friendship," Sullivan told

the Buffalo Courier. "The fact that he remembered me on his deathbed shows that he must have thought well of old John." As he commented on Dixon's final days, a lonely time marked by poverty and alcoholism, Sullivan added, "I hope he'll land in a place where they'll treat him better." Then, with the same bombast he'd once used to put fear into his rivals, he vowed to help give Dixon a decent burial. Indeed, it was believed that Sullivan and a few other fighters pitched in to pay for a funeral.

And what a funeral it turned out to be. Dixon's body spent a day lying in state at New York's Longacre Athletic Club on West 29th Street, where admirers could pay their respects. From there, his remains were sent to Boston, where a service was held at the Charles Street African Methodist Episcopal Church. According to the Boston Globe, there were approximately 2,000 people in attendance, with another 2,000 outside in the cold January wind. The throng included both white and black attendees, and left the Globe's reporter breathless. "Unquestionably," he wrote, "no other funeral of a colored person ever held in this city was so well attended." Dixon was laid to rest at the Mount Hope Cemetery in Mattapan not far from the grave of Mike "King" Kelly, a beloved member of the Boston Beaneaters baseball club.

Sullivan's commitments in Buffalo prevented him from attending the funeral, but he mentioned Dixon in several forthcoming columns for the Globe. He praised Dixon as "a great little fighter" and lambasted Dixon's managers for leaving him with nothing. He even boasted of how he and Dixon had turned heads in heavily segregated New Orleans when they were seen traveling around the city together. (He hadn't known that Dixon, taking note of Sullivan's deteriorating condition, laid a few dollars down on Corbett.)

Sullivan had never been so open about his feelings for Dixon. It was as if Dixon's claim that Sullivan was his only friend opened up the older fighter's heart. Perhaps it took the chilling blast of death to wither Sullivan's gruff demeanor. It's also likely that Sullivan saw in Dixon a nightmare vision of what could've been his own demise. Like Dixon, Sullivan had blown his own fortune and, had he not stopped drinking, may well have ended up broke and alone in a hospital ward.



The Ring rated Dixon, a former bantamweight and two-time featherweight champ, among the best black boxers ever.

Some Sullivan biographers have criticized him for not being more upfront about his friendship with Dixon, but it's unfair to judge Sullivan with modern eyes. What can't be disputed is that Sullivan's very public sadness in the weeks after Dixon's passing had to have an impact. Sullivan was, after all, one of the most celebrated figures in the country. For him to declare his genuine affection for a black man must've had an effect that bordered on the profound.

True, many would argue that Sullivan's money-lending gesture wasn't enough to erase his many years of racist thinking, which included his refusal to defend his title against black fighters, and that being friends with a famous black athlete didn't cost him anything. Still, in the world of 1908, the old bigot may have inadvertently done something positive for race relations.

His fans included schoolchildren. Though 16 years had passed since Sullivan met his finish at the fists of Corbett, he loomed over the sports world like a one-man Mount Rushmore. A Boston teacher complained around this time that Sullivan seemed more important to local kids than the city's reigning mayor. Did they hear, as Dixon's body was transported to its final resting place, that Sullivan had been a friend to this black man? Did they hear Dixon's claim that he had reached out to others in desperation, but only Sullivan responded? If we look to our idols to see our own reflection, Sullivan gave Americans plenty to consider in the days after Dixon's death.

He showed that humanity could spring up in the most unlikely places.

SHE WILL ROCK YOU

FROM BASS GUITAR TO BOXING GLOVES, **MIKAELA MAYER'S** JOURNEY HAS PUT HER IN STRIKING DISTANCE OF STARDOM – EXACTLY WHERE SHE SHOULD BE

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Mayer took her game up another notch in June, winning her first 10-rounder with a near-shutout decision over former title challenger Lizbeth Crespo.

DIXON: BOB THOMAS/POPPERFOTO; SULLI... ARCHIVES

In the past two years, when talk drifted to the topic of future superstars in women's boxing, the names Claressa Shields and Katie Taylor were often the two that came to mind immediately. But if Mikaela Mayer has her way, she will become the true rock star of the sport. Fitting, since she's had a little practice living that life.

Sort of.

"I went on my first U.S. tour when I was 14 years old and my dad came with us," laughed Mayer, once the bassist for the all-female band LiaFail. If it seems like the wildest story ever for a future Olympian and pro boxing contender, it is.

"Most people think it's crazy," admits Mayer. "I was real young to be doing something like that, but I think I've always been a little bit beyond my years."

Mayer says she found her passion in the gym and her focus has been on being the best ever since.

Formed in July 2003 when Mayer was just 13, the band headlined at the legendary Whisky a Go Go in Hollywood just two months later and then hit the road. The highlight for the quartet was playing the Warped Tour in 2005, but soon after, Mayer was done. Just like that.

"I'm such an extremist that if I'm gonna do something, I'm gonna do it a hundred percent," said Mayer. "And when I decided that I wasn't gonna be in this band anymore and I wanted to do something else, I literally never picked up the bass again. The same thing happened with my boxing. I went from not even being in any sports at the time to walking into the gym one day and suddenly saying I want to be the best female fighter in the world and I want to go to the Olympics. So I've always been a little crazy like that."

One of Mayer's bandmates, Nita Strauss, has evolved into one of the top rock guitarists in the world and is currently playing with the legendary Alice Cooper. As for Mayer, a journey that began when she put gloves on her fists for the first time when she was 17 has led her to the top of the junior lightweight division and into the discussion not just for world titles but for a superfight with undisputed 135-pound champion Taylor down the line.

But first, one last music reference: As the Grateful Dead sang, "What a long, strange trip it's been."

Mayer, now 29, would likely agree. Yet for someone who has always appeared to be a young woman in a hurry, her patience as a professional prizefighter has been Job-like.

"I think I've always been that type of person where I know things are gonna happen for me at the perfect time," she said. "They'll come together when they're meant to come together."

So while Shields, her teammate on the 2016 U.S. Olympic team, fought for and won a world title in her fourth pro bout and Taylor did the same in her seventh appearance in the punch-for-pay ranks, Mayer is satisfied with the way things are going after moving to 11-0 with her first 10-rounder, a win over Lizbeth Crespo in June. It's an attitude she owes to promoter Top Rank and manager George Ruiz, but especially to her longtime coach, Al Mitchell.

"I think one of the reasons why I am sort of humble and not very loud and am patient is because of Coach Al," said Mayer, whose bond with the respected trainer is so strong that she has his initials tattooed on her right hand. "I study my opponents, I don't put anything past anyone, I take everyone very seriously, and that's just the way I was trained. Coach Al has trained me to be that way. He tells me, 'Just relax. People are gonna talk, people are gonna say things, people are gonna want to egg you on. They're gonna say bad things about you.' And he's told me to not listen to them, keep showing up, keep coming to the gym and everything will fall in line when it's meant to fall in line. And that's the mindset he's instilled in me."

Being with Top Rank hasn't hurt, either. Masters at developing fighters, the matchmakers for the Las Vegas-based promoter have gotten Mayer the right fights at the right time, all the while putting her in situations where she can shine, whether on televised cards or on high-profile undercards – or both. Mayer, The Ring's 2018 female Prospect of the Year, appreciates the way she's been brought up in the game, especially since she believes Top Rank was taking a chance signing her.

"They didn't really know," she said. "They didn't see me fight a lot, because I was fighting overseas in Bulgaria (as an amateur) and no one saw my fights. And they didn't really know if they could develop a market for women's boxing. So they took a risk with signing me. They thought I could do it, because they wouldn't have signed me if they didn't, but they still didn't know. So I think they were cautious, too, in the beginning. What can she handle? And I think I had to prove to them fight after fight that I was ready to step up. And I think they saw that too."

Let's not mince words here. Mayer was (and is) as much of a sure thing as you will find in a fighter making the transition from the amateur to the pro ranks. First, she can fight. Second, she may be the most marketable fighter in the ladies' game. Three, she gets it – it being the fact that this is a business, not just a sport. That normally comes with a negative connotation among diehard fight fans, but credit Mayer and her team for wanting to make the biggest fights when they're at their height. And yes, the Californian admits that she is starting to get a bit antsy.

"I've recently started to get a little impatient," she laughs. "I feel like now I'm ready, but I'm glad I waited for two reasons. One, I've been able to adjust to the pro style and I made some good adjustments. I've learned how to work to the body, I've settled down a little bit, I'm staying behind my jab and people are seeing that too. Number two, I want women's boxing to be built up. I don't want to win these world titles and no one is watching. I want the world to be watching, and people are finally starting to pay attention to women's boxing. I want to have a following when I get these world titles. I want people to be excited to see me, and I want to be able to reel in the numbers."

A Mayer vs. Taylor bout would certainly get people excited and pull big numbers. So is that the fight Mayer has set her sights on? Yes, but not just yet. First, there's the business of getting some belts at 130 pounds, and with formidable titlists Eva Wahlstrom (WBC), Hyun Mi Choi (WBA), Ewa Brodnicka (WBO) and Maiva Hamadouche (IBF) sporting a combined record of 77-2-2, she'll have to fight hard for them. That's no problem for Mayer, as it's all part of her master plan.

"I want these titles at 130 first," she said. "I've always taken pride in the fact that I've had a business mindset as well, and that's important in a sport like this. And I know that me going against Katie Taylor right now, it might be exciting, but imagine in a year or so: We're both world champions, we're both undefeated, we both built women's boxing and built our followings and it's just a way bigger fight."

The big time. It's what Mikaela Mayer was made for. And while she once thought it would be on stage with a bass guitar, now it's in the ring with gloves on.

"I knew immediately when I walked into that gym that this is what I wanted to do with my life," she said. "Some people live their whole lifetime without finding that type of love and passion for something, so that is what drives me every day. It's crazy because it's been 12 years of me doing this, and things are finally coming together and I'm starting to reap the rewards. I didn't get that type of satisfaction after the Olympics, which was really hard for me because I thought that was what I was meant to do and I thought that was where I was going to feel this sense of satisfaction, and I didn't at all. But in hindsight, I feel like it led me to where I am now. This is exactly what I was meant to do."

ENTER THE OCTAGON

BY GARETH A DAVIES

Jon Jones beat Thiago Santos at his own (stand-up) game.

The UFC's most accomplished – and arguably most controversial – fighter, Jon Jones, retained his light heavyweight title with a split decision over Thiago Santos, while Amanda Nunes blasted out Holly Holm in the opening round of their women's bantamweight title contest at UFC 239 on July 6 in Las Vegas.

Earlier in the week, Rashad Evans and Mike Bisping, former light heavyweight and middleweight champions respectively, both now retired, were inducted into the UFC Hall of Fame. Evans was particularly enlightening in a conversation with me on fight night, in which he explained that his belief is that there should be "far more openness" in the sport with fighters "talking about mental health issues." He insisted that in one of the toughest pursuits on earth, therapy and mental counseling would go a long way toward assisting fighters, who often find themselves "at the edge of a precipice mentally." It was certainly food for thought from one of the great fighters – and gentlemen – to fight in a UFC Octagon, and who now works regularly as an analyst for CBS' coverage of MMA.

Meanwhile, it was Jones who played Brazilian challenger Santos at his own game in a largely stand-up fight, taking center stage in retaining his 205-pound title belt for the second time in his current reign (eight times in his first), not once choosing to use his wrestling. It was a gamble, but it paid off as the American squeaked his way to victory. Santos was always dangerous, always ready with a cocked counter left hook from the southpaw stance. But three of the five rounds were clearly won by Jones, in my view.

All told, it was as thrilling as Nunes, who can now lay claim to being the greatest women's fighter of all time, stopping former champion Holm in the opening exchanges. After her victory over Cris Cyborg Santos, Nunes has learned to punctate patience with brutal attacks, and with both 135- and 145-pound championship belts now in her possession, her legacy is poised to expand even further.

Notable, too, was the victory for Jorge Masvidal, who knocked out Ben Askren by flying knee with his very first attack, leaping at the accomplished American wrestler just seconds into their bout.

★ ★ ★

Over at Bellator 224 on July 12, Canadian Julia Budd retained her featherweight belt against Olga Rubin, revealing that she will never forget her first year in MMA, when she was defeated by Ronda Rousey and Nunes. It was a baptism by fire in the now-defunct Strikeforce – which was bought out by the UFC – almost 10 years ago. Budd, headlining at the WinStar World Casino in Thackerville, Oklahoma, defended her crown for the third time against the unbeaten Israeli, stopping Rubin in the opening round with a brutal attack.

★ ★ ★

There is always drama emanating from the great hall in Manhattan that has housed fights for over 100 years. It was no different when Madison Square Garden hosted Bellator 222 in mid-June, with narratives to resonate for the second half of this year. Bellator's

welterweight king, Rory MacDonald, had to keep focused for every second of every minute of every round to defeat Neiman Gracie – a nephew of Royce Gracie, who won UFC 1 UFC 2 and UFC 4 back in 1993-'94 – and retain his welterweight crown in the headliner, which doubled as the semifinal for Bellator's year-long 170-pound tournament on DAZN.

The Canadian thwarted the Brazilian's submission attempts with great physicality, proving that he has more in the tank after expressing doubts about "wanting to hurt" opponents following his fight with Jon Fitch just six weeks before. MacDonald gained a points victory over five hard-fought rounds and will now rematch Douglas Lima, whom he beat early last year to claim the 170-pound belt, in the final in November.

The night will also be remembered for the closure of Chael Sonnen's fighting career; he retired at the age of 42 after being stopped by another legend in Lyoto Machida. Sonnen finished with a 31-17-1 record – over the course of his last dozen fights, 10 of his opponents had held UFC titles. His career was tainted, though, after he had tested positive for banned substances in 2014.

★ ★ ★

Indeed, the fluid fighting machine Machida, who twice dropped Sonnen with knees as the American attempted the takedown, called for Bellator to stage its first-ever event in Brazil. They certainly have the personnel in 'The Dragon' Machida, Lima and Patricio Pitbull – champion at featherweight and lightweight – who would clearly provide the fulcrum for a fine card.

"It would be very well received if Bellator took an event there," Machida told me. Conversely, Scott Coker, president of Bellator, announced as the event concluded in New York that the great heavyweight Fedor Emelianenko has signed a multi-fight deal. I understand that

Amanda Nunes charges Holly Holm during their UFC 239 co-main event.

the first of those could be a New Year's Eve fight for the legendary Russian – regarded as the Mike Tyson of MMA for his unbeaten 10-year run – in Japan.

Featherweight (145 pounds) Juan Archuleta banjoed Brazilian Eduardo Dantas earlier on the card, moving to 18-straight fights undefeated, and will face Pitbull at The Forum in Inglewood, California, on September 28.

★ ★ ★

MMA continues to grow globally, demonstrated by the recent tentpole event for Bellator in London, which drew close to 1 million viewers. Rafael Lovato Jr. claimed the middleweight title from Gegard Mousasi over five hard-fought rounds.

Bellator 223 was shown in sequence on Sky Sports and Channel 5 as well as Virgin in Ireland, which is akin to CBS and ESPN sharing the broadcast of an event in the U.S., and there is little doubt that league now has the most powerful deal in Europe. The event on Channel 5 peaked at over 700,000 viewers, it is understood, and that bodes well for the live broadcasts to come.

The London card brought significant victories for welterweight Paul Daley (over Brazilian Erick Silva in a brutal three-round fight) and Irish favorite at bantamweight/featherweight James Gallagher (who will headline in Dublin on September 27 at the 3Arena against Sunderland fighter Cal Ellenor), while Dutch kickboxing legend Melvin Manhoef fought a savvy battle against boxer/MMA fighter Kent Kauppinen to win a unanimous decision. Bellator plans to have Manhoef headline in Amsterdam next year in an expanded European series that will likely include 10 events, doubling the number on this side of The Pond in 2019. RING

WORLD BEAT

The impressiveness of Dillian Whyte's victory over Oscar Rivas was soon overshadowed by controversy.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

The heavies have been the big news in the U.K. once more. Dillian Whyte was inspired to prove his promoter, Eddie Hearn, wrong in claiming victory over previously unbeaten Oscar Rivas in a tough, grueling 12-rounder to become mandatory challenger to WBC titleholder Deontay Wilder.

"I'm always being written off, and even my own promoter said I would get knocked out by Rivas," said Whyte in the aftermath, having won a unanimous points victory by scores of 115-112, 115-112 and 116-111 at the O2 Arena in London's Docklands, his eighth contest there, surviving a ninth-round knockdown courtesy of an uppercut from the Colombian.

"As usual, I went out there and proved Eddie and everyone else wrong," he explained. "I've beaten world champions, former world champions and the rising undefeated stars of the division in the last few years. All that is happening is that I'm sharpening my tools ready for those big fights."

Whyte consistently looked to land jabs and body attacks against Rivas, who carries a Mike Tyson-esque physique of tiny waist, broad back and huge, fast, muscular arms. Whyte thwarted almost every attack with straight punches and body shots. This was one of the most physical contests the 31-year-old has been in.

A chastised Hearn conceded: "Dillian gets better with every fight, and he showed beyond any doubt how much he wants it at this level. We want to keep him busy as he prepares for the world title next year, but I don't think anyone would disagree if he got an easy fight while he waits for his opportunity to fight for the belt."

Unfortunately, all this may be for naught, as it was soon being said that Whyte had tested positive for banned substances before the fight and nobody had told Rivas' camp about it. The WBC suspended Whyte's status as interim titleholder and calls to overturn the result were flying at press time.

The heavyweights were out in force on the July 20 card, though, with Dereck Chisora rocketing himself back into the spotlight with a second-round knockout of former world title challenger Artur Szpilka

that oozed with beautiful brutality.

"I'm not the guy interested in the belts any more," Chisora said. "I'm the moneyweight fighter of the division." Up next for him, in the fall, will be a matchup with former WBO heavyweight titleholder Joseph Parker.

Another heavyweight on the card, Dave Allen, meanwhile, announced what appeared to be his retirement in the wake of collapsing after his defeat to David Price. Allen required oxygen in the ring and was ferried out of the arena in a wheelchair. He had been resurgent in his four fights in the past year but was forced to absorb huge punishment from the 6-foot-9 Price. Trainer Darren Barker pulled his exhausted fighter out of the contest on his stool at the end of the 10th round. Allen explained on social media from the hospital that his health had been deteriorating in the past 18 months and that he was "probably done."

On the previous weekend at the same East London venue, Daniel Dubois told me he was going to "take over heavyweight boxing" and "make this next few years my era" after he had claimed the vacant British heavyweight title against Nathan Gorman by fifth-round stoppage. The 6-foot-5, 21-year-old Londoner, who is now unbeaten in 12 fights, including 11 knockouts, looked very impressive, especially with his jab setting up his "Dynamite" right hands.

Catching up with Dubois at his local sports center in Greenwich a few days later – along with his sister, Caroline, and brother, Prince – he outlined his growing ambitions. "I feel ready to fight all of them now, the very best, including Deontay Wilder, Tyson Fury, Anthony Joshua and Dillian Whyte, but I know my dad, my trainer, Martin Bowers, and my promoter, Frank Warren, don't want to rush me through the ranks," he explained. "Once you are up there fighting at that level, you have to stay there, and you are learning on the job, but I know I'm still a year or so away from chasing those guys and I need to get more experience under my belt. But I don't fear any of them. This is my time. I'm going to make this my era, my time, and shine."

As a footnote, watch out for Caroline Dubois. Just 18, she is aiming to compete for Great Britain at the Olympic Games in Tokyo next year, while 15-year-old Prince, already over six feet tall, could yet prove to be the best of the three, according to his older siblings.

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The London Telegraph.

BRADLEY COLLYER

Dereck Chisora (left) remains a dangerous heavyweight gatekeeper, as evidenced by his KO of the Year-candidate stoppage of Artur Szpilka.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

There are currently four world titleholders from the Philippines (as of this writing: Jerwin Ancajas, Nonito Donaire, Manny Pacquiao and Vic Saludar), but none are as underexposed as Saludar. The 28-year-old from the southern farming town of Polomolok won't

be seen on variety shows or palling around with celebrities. Despite being the WBO strawweight titleholder, his fights aren't even televised in his home country.

"I'm not the type to go around and hang around with other people; I just like to stay home with my family," said Saludar, a married father of two. "No recognition like (John Riel) Casimero, Donaire or Pacquiao – that's too far."

It doesn't help that he fights in the smallest weight class in the sport – 105 pounds – or that his biggest fights typically take place abroad, where promoters with greater means than his host the fights. Saludar picked up the title in Japan in July 2018, dropping Ryuya Yamanaka en route to winning a decision. He followed that up with a defense in February, also in Japan, decisioning Masataka Taniguchi.

Saludar (19-3, 10 knockouts) has had a turbulent career, losing his third fight after breaking his hand, then losing his first title attempt against Kosei Tanaka, but only after dropping the defending beltholder with a right hand and leading widely on all three cards heading into the sixth, when a body shot ended his challenge. Saludar's most recent loss came in 2017, a split decision against the similarly inconsistent Toto Landero.

Saludar is set for a mandatory defense on August 24 against Wilfredo Mendez (13-1, 5 KOs) in Puerto Rico, which Saludar's camp feels will clear the way to bigger opportunities.

"He is the biggest obstacle for Vic," said trainer Michael Palacios, who was hired by promoter Kenneth Rontal two years ago. "If we surpass this, we are ready to go to the next level, which would be to unify the titles."

Saludar, one of 14 children, came up as tough as most other fighters from his nation. His father planted corn on a farm for about 150 pesos ($5) per day, and to make extra money for rice, Vic and his four brothers would box every week in amateur shows, making 75 to 150 pesos per fight.

Vic and Rey Saludar went on to become part of the Philippine national team, with Vic earning bronze at the 2010 Asian Games and Rey taking the gold in his division. Older brother Froilan fought for a title last year, losing in six rounds to Sho Kimura for the WBO flyweight belt.

Winning a world title enabled Vic to buy a plot of land for his family in Polomolok, and he plans to buy a second property for his wife and kids after the Mendez fight. Palacios feels Saludar is the best-skilled champion at 105 pounds and would relish a unification fight against WBA titleholder Wanheng Menayothin. Saludar would settle for getting a TV deal so his family can watch his fights from home.

"I am content that my life is simple," he said. "But if there's an opportunity to be recognized, why not?"

★★★

Arthur Villanueva announced his retirement after falling short in a third attempt at a world title on July 6 against WBC beltholder Nordine Oubaali. It was a rough outing for the Bacolod City fighter, who was down once before his corner stopped the fight.

The 30-year-old retires with a record of 32-4-1 (18 KOs) and plans to become a trainer at the ALA Gym after a brief respite with family. He cites getting off the canvas twice to outpoint Taiki Eto in 2012 for the vacant OPBF junior bantamweight title as his proudest moment in the ring.

"I'm happy with my achievements, and I never regret," said Villanueva, before adding, "I know I can be a world champion, but maybe it's my fault that I fail in my chances to become a world champion because I never give my all in training.

Vic Saludar (right) won the WBO 105-pound title by outpointing Ryuya Yamanaka in Japan in July 2018.

"That's what I want to teach other boxers, that they will not ever give up on their dreams."

★★★

Upset alert: Joe Noynay (18-2-1, 7 KOs) scored two knockdowns of 2012 Olympic bronze medalist Satoshi Shimizu en route to a sixth-round TKO in Japan on July 12. It was Shimizu's first loss, having won all eight of his previous fights inside the distance. Noynay hails from Bogo, Cebu, the hometown of Gabriel "Flash" Elorde, and is part of the Gabriel "Bebot" Elorde Jr. stable.

★★★

After a 93-year drought of Filipino vs. Filipino world title fights, there will be a third one in the span of just over a year. Samuel Salva (17-0, 10 KOs) will meet compatriot Pedro Taduran (13-2, 10 KOs) for the IBF strawweight title vacated by Deejay Kriel. The fight will take place on September 7 at the Navy Base in the Fort Bonifacio section of Taguig City, Philippines.

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SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Most big stars are reluctant to travel. Mayweather stayed in Vegas. Roy Jones had to get old before he would leave the U.S. The list is long, and for good reason. The visiting fighter often has to deal with a hostile crowd, a referee who is not going to do him any favors, and there have been cases of promoters making things as uncomfortable as possible for the away fighter. The number one reason, however, is the difficulty of getting the nod on the scorecards. Whether this is due to the influence of the hosting promoter or partisan crowd, coupled with the subjective aspects of judging or just out-and-out corruption, is open for debate.

If, however, you happen to sit in an off-the-beaten-path country with a weak currency to boot, traveling is often the only option. Three South Africans had to do just that … with mixed results.

Welterweight contender **Thulani Mbenge** had the momentum behind him with stoppage wins over Diego Chaves and Miguel Vazquez, but that didn't help him when he took on fellow unbeaten – albeit untested – welterweight Sebastian Formella in his hometown of Hamburg.

After a slow opening round, the fight kicked off in the second stanza with Mbenge landing his power jabs and a hard left hook while Formella moved in and out, landing shoeshine punches. Formella boxed well off the back foot, making Mbenge miss and frustrating the South African, who still managed to land the harder, more eye-catching shots when he pinned down the fleet-footed German.

From the fifth round, the tide seemed to turn in favor of the South African, who landed some hard body shots as Formella slowed down. Mbenge nailed Formella with two hard straight rights in the sixth, the second appearing to shake the German, the difference in power becoming obvious. Mbenge punctuated the round by snapping Formella's head back with a left uppercut.

Formella was gutsy and kept hanging in there, although the power punches of Mbenge appeared to be taking their toll. Then the momentum was briefly lost when the referee gave Formella a timeout after what appeared to be a borderline low blow in the seventh. Mbenge had Formella holding on in the eighth after hurting him with a right, and a stoppage in a round or two appeared to be a possibility. But then the referee took a point from Mbenge in the ninth for another low blow, resulting in yet another break for Formella. After every break, a reenergized Formella

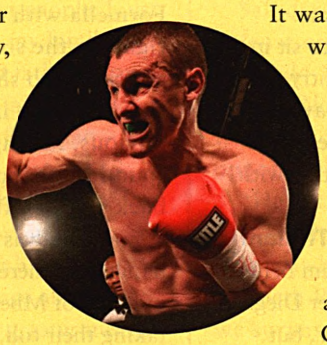
Welterweight prospect Thulani Mbenge was all smiles after winning a regional African title in 2016.

flurried back – and that possibly could have enabled him to steal some rounds.

Mbenge appeared to be back in control in the 10th, but tired in the championship rounds, which, coupled with another break for a low blow, enabled Formella to rally.

The judges gave the fight to Formella by scores of 116-112, 115-112 and 114-113. I had Mbenge a two-point winner but could have lived with a draw.

There is talk of a rematch, but nothing has been confirmed at the time of writing.



Ryno Liebenberg's most recent bout ended in a draw.

On the same night, **Ryno Liebenberg** took on unbeaten German light heavyweight prospect Nick Hannig in Wiesbaden. Liebenberg boxed well behind his jab for the first few rounds, forcing Hannig to reset. When the WBC open scoring indicated that the judges were not impressed by The South African's technical approach, he alternated between boxing and fighting, landing some hard shots to the head and body. The German seemed unable to find his rhythm, moving around the perimeter of the ring before jumping in to attack in spurts. He did have some success up close and during the odd exchange, but he was inconsistent and Liebenberg appeared to be the ring general throughout.

The fight was declared a draw by scores of 114-114 twice and a 115-113 card in favor of Hannig. Liebenberg's status as a reliable gatekeeper at both 175 and 168 pounds remains intact.

It was up to featherweight **Lerato Dlamini** to turn the fortunes of the globe-trotting South Africans, and that he did in fine style, handing hard-hitting Filipino Dave Penalosa his first loss, prevailing by scores of 117-109, 118-108 and 119-107.

Fighting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Dlamini, who also holds a win over former WBA titleholder and Chris John-conqueror Simpiwe Vetyeka, was simply too good for Penalosa.

It was as dominating a win as one could have, barring a stoppage. A Dlamini right hand scored a flash knockdown in the fourth, and a one-two combination dumped Penalosa on the canvas again in the 10th. Given the right opportunities, Dlamini has the goods to become a player in the highly competitive 126-pound division.

Droeks Malan is the South African correspondent for The Ring. You can reach him via Twitter @droeksonboxing and read his blogs on couchpotatofightguru.blogspot.com.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

In a savage display of desperate courage, Ryota Murata quickly overwhelmed Rob Brant during their rematch on July 12 in Osaka. Murata (15-2, 12 KOs) stopped Brant at 2:34 in the second round, avenging the loss his American rival had inflicted by outpointing him 265 days earlier in Las Vegas.

Adding to Murata's accomplishment is the fact that his first fight with Brant (25-2, 17 KOs) was not even competitive. Brant's 1,200 punches and quick lateral movement embarrassed the Japanese hero throughout 12 one-sided rounds. After the bout, which was televised on ESPN in the U.S., Murata confessed that he was considering retirement. However, he thought it over and announced this challenge in late April. He said he'd learned a lot from the first fight and would make the right adjustments: This time, he would set the tempo, close the distance immediately and not allow the talented American to warm up or gain confidence. Murata would be the one to dictate the fight.

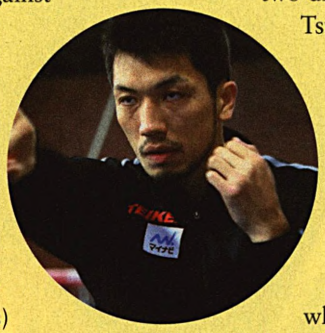
"I am the most confident I've been since I turned pro," he said at the final press conference, two days before the rematch.

Brant started busy, as expected, from the opening bell. Murata was determined and stayed close to the 28-year-old Minnesota native. He attacked Brant's body and a heavy counter right staggered the U.S. odds favorite late in the opening round. About 30 seconds into the second round, Murata struck again with his right and immediately rushed Brant, producing a knockdown. The fight continued and Murata kept punching for almost two minutes until the referee mercifully halted it.

"I did what I did in the gym; that's how I won this fight," Murata said during his post-fight interview. "My whole team made this happen." The crowd inside the EDION Arena responded loudly to the winner's voice. Murata was already a star in Japan for winning an Olympic gold medal and his subsequent success as a professional, but his hero status has grown with this mission completed. His dream of "bigger fights" against bigger names will be backed by more fans.

In the co-featured bout to Brant-Murata II, junior flyweight beltholder Ken Shiro (16-0, 9 KOs) stopped Filipino southpaw Jonathan Taconing (28-4-1, 22 KOs) at 1:00 of the fourth round to make the sixth defense of his WBC title. Shiro always says "the jab is the key to making my fight," which means he might not be as good against southpaws because the range of jabs is different from orthodox fighters. Taconing was once a sparring partner who helped Shiro prepare for his rematch with grizzled former titleholder Ganigan Lopez, a southpaw from Mexico, last May.

Thanks in part to the gym work with Taconing, Shiro stopped Lopez, who had held Shiro to a majority decision in 2017, in just two rounds. This time, Shiro looked good against the familiar opponent. He controlled Taconing's aggression with jabs and found the timing for a good counter right uppercut and hooks early in the second round. In the third round, Shiro was deducted a point (per the WBC rules) when a headbutt caused bleeding from Taconing's forehead. The babyfaced warrior kept cool when the challenger charged forward, dodging Taconing's big left and countering with a ruthless, knockdown-producing right. Taconing stood up, but the referee called the fight, as he did not see any will to continue from the Filipino.



Ryota Murata is better the second time around.

"I am happy to show a clean knockout to the audience," Shiro said during his post-fight interview. "I want tougher challenges, including unification bouts."

It was about two years ago when Shiro, already a titleholder, was sparring in America (at the Maywood Boxing Club in Maywood, California). An observer at the gym told him, "You are too strong for a junior high school student." Now everybody knows this boyish face is just as deceiving as his viciousness in the ring.)

Also, it may be known that his registered name, "Ken Shiro," is from his true first name given by his father, former OPBF light heavyweight champion Hisashi Terachi, after a manga hero, Kenshiro of Hokuto-no-Ken (Fist of the North Star). As the Japanese Boxing Commission (JBC) rules that all boxers must register a first and last name, the father got the idea to divide his son's first name into two parts: "Ken" and "Shiro." So, please, call him just "Ken Shiro."

The same night Murata and Ken Shiro impressed people in Osaka, one of the greatest national rivalries in the history of Japanese female boxing took place at the famous Korakuen Hall in Tokyo. Five-weight titleholder Naoko Fujioka (18-2-1, 7 KOs) and two-division titleholder Tsunami Tenkai (26-12-1, 15 KOs) battled for Fujioka's current WBA flyweight title in 10 two-minute rounds. The two leaders of Japanese female professional boxing, which the JBC began to sanction in 2008, have interestingly opposite fighting styles. Fujioka, still the indisputable queen of Japan at the age of 43, makes the most of her physical strength and natural abilities. On the other hand, Tenkai is a master of defense; her movement is so quick and beautiful and full of defensive tactics. In this fight, Tenkai dodged Fujioka's aggressive hands effectively and peppered her with light punches from the beginning. Fujioka has never lost to domestic rivals, but this time she was losing the earlier half of the fight.

"I could not hit her at all," she said afterward. "I was thinking, 'I am gonna lose to (a Japanese) girl, finally.' But my body refused to quit and worked spontaneously instead." The champion pressured Tenkai with devastating hooks and big rights in later rounds. Tenkai was still dodging beautifully, but Fujioka's offense appealed to the judges and she ended up keeping her belt via split draw with the scores of 96-95, 94-96, 95-95.

The belt is indispensable to her longterm dream. It has been a year-and-a-half since Fujioka gained the interest of Ben Lira, a prominent veteran trainer and an expert in female boxing, in South El Monte, California. Lira used to train Mexican star Mariana "Barbie" Juarez, whom Fujioka beat in Mexico in 2015. "All I want to do now," said Fujioka, "is get into the ring in America." RING

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THE PROFESSOR GOES TO SCHOOL

Following a 15th-round stoppage defeat at the hands of the legendary Salvador Sanchez in July 1982, Azumah Nelson went unbeaten for eight years. “The Professor” had annexed world titles at featherweight and junior lightweight when he made the audacious choice of challenging Ring Magazine/WBC/IBF lightweight champion Pernell Whitaker on May 19, 1990, at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. It was a bridge too far. “Sweet Pea” befuddled the Ghanaian superstar with speed, angles and an omnipresent southpaw jab that worked wonders over 12 rounds. Whitaker was deducted a point in the final round for unsavory showboating tactics, but two of the tallies for his unanimous decision victory (116-111, 116-114, 115-113) were far too close. This was a master class and one of the finest performances of the great champion's career.

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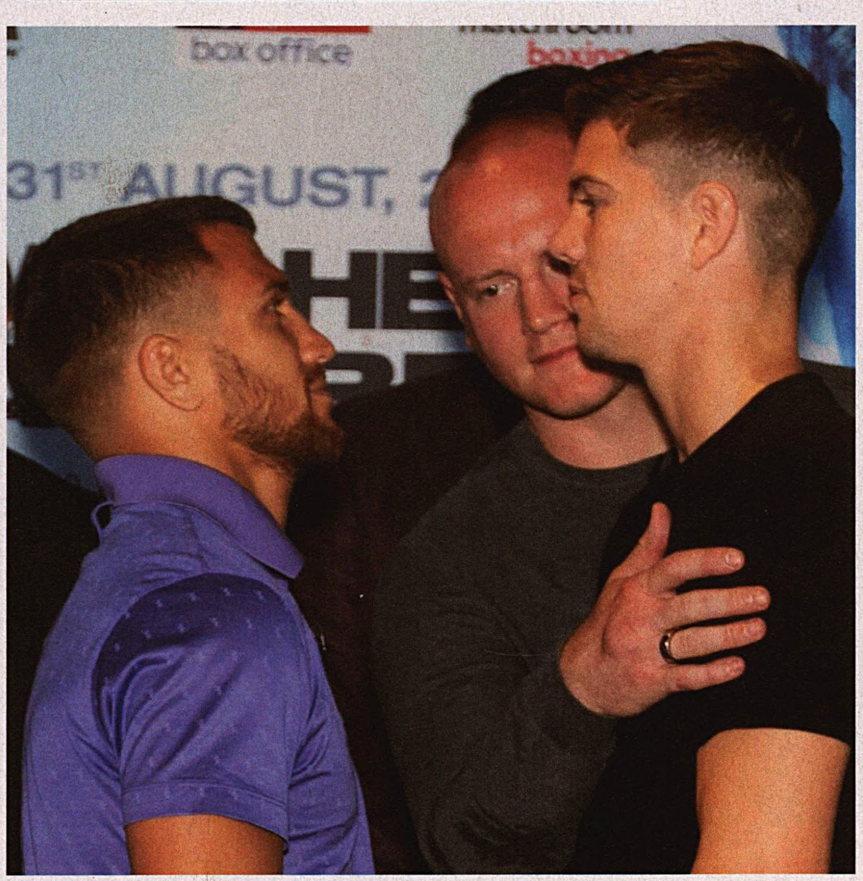

Ring Magazine lightweight champ Vasiliy Lomachenko stares down ... make that up at British challenger Luke Campbell (flanked by the recently retired George Groves) after the press conference for their August 31 showdown in London.

AUGUST

AUG. 31 – Caleb Truax vs. Peter Quillin, super middleweights, Minneapolis (Fox). Also, Erislandy Lara vs. Ramon Alvarez, junior middleweights.
AUG. 31 - Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. Luke Campbell, lightweights (for Lomachenko's Ring, WBA and WBO titles, and vacant WBC title), London (ESPN).

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 13 – Devin Haney vs. Zaur Abdullaev, lightweights, Las Vegas (DAZN).
SEPT. 21 – Andrew Selby vs. Jay Harris, flyweights, London (ESPN+).
SEPT. 28 – Errol Spence Jr. vs. Shawn Porter, welterweights (for Spence's IBF and Porter's WBC titles), Los Angeles (Fox PPV). Also, Anthony Dirrell vs. David Benavidez, super middleweights (for Dirrell's WBC title).

OCTOBER

OCT. 5 – Junto Nakatani vs. Milan Melindo, junior bantamweights, Tokyo.
OCT. 18 – Oleksandr Gvozdyk vs. Artur Beterbiev, light heavyweights (for Gvozdyk's WBC and Beterbiev's IBF titles), location TBA (ESPN).

NOVEMBER

NOV. 9 – Jamel Herring vs. Lamont Roach Jr., junior lightweights (for Herring's WBO title), location TBA (ESPN+).
SEPT. 28 – Deontay Wilder vs. Luis Ortiz, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), Los Angeles (Showtime).

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